

UNIV. OF ARIZONA

PQ2260.G89 P713

mn

Gobineau, Arthur/The lucky prisoner



3 9001 03909 4464



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023

<https://archive.org/details/luckyprisoner0000will>

THE LUCKY PRISONER

[*Le Prisonier Chanceux*]

FOREIGN FICTION

By Francis de Miomandre

ORIENTALE

WRITTEN ON WATER

THE LOVE LIFE OF VENUS

By Jean Giono

HILL OF DESTINY

By Francesco Perri

ENOUGH OF DREAMS

By Mariano Azuela

THE UNDER DOGS

By Hellmuth Unger

THE WHITE BETRAYAL

By Karel Capek

MONEY

PQ
2260
G89
P7L3
Arthur, Comte de Gobineau

THE
LUCKY
PRISONER

Translated from the French

by

William A. Drake



MCMXXX

Brentano's, New York

COPYRIGHT 1930 BY BRENTANO'S, INC.

*Manufactured in the United States of
America by the Plimpton Press,
Norwood, Massachusetts*

THE LUCKY PRISONER

[*Le Prisonier Chanceux*]



I

Of the Frightful Suspicions which Our Hero Drew on Himself in His Earliest Youth, and of the Plans He had Formed.

T the beginning of the year 1563, in the province of Guienne, stood a castle which, while it may not have been the most admirable of all castles, was none the less a very sightly edifice. It is true that it did not present any of those marvelous architectural effects that turn rough boulders into precious stones, but to make up for that, one's admiration was inspired by the solidity and thickness of its good stout walls, which had probably weathered several centuries and were certainly prepared to weather several more without weakening. It displayed no futile adornment, no superfluous outcroppings. It was a vast and comfortable dwelling for its lord and his family, with plenty of room for his servants and horses. What more was needed? The people of the country round about had good reason to consider the castle of La Tour-Miracle very beautiful indeed.

It was even more highly esteemed by its proprietor, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa de la Tour-Miracle, Baron de Frostac, who in this ancient dwelling kept green the

memories of all his race. When any of his friends praised his castle, he liked to speak of the tender hereditary affection with which he regarded these venerable roofs; and he assured them that a man of honor must cherish the dwelling in which his ancestors had lived no less than the children who should bear his name. He advanced more reasons to support this opinion than would be convenient to set forth. Few days passed without his congratulating himself at having been born a gentleman and not a great lord.

"I consider the position of a great lord to be very delicate," Messire Aurèle-Agrippa often said to his parish priest, "and it seems to me it would be difficult to avoid compromising its renown. In the first place, it is necessary to go to great expense to live up to one's name and its fame. It is therefore necessary to have a great deal of money, and a great need of money leads to some very deplorable things. But a simple gentleman like myself can go with his elbows out without scandalizing anyone, and so devote all his wealth to the service of king and country. Look at all of the Tour-Miracles! Against whom have they not warred? Against the English, against the Spaniards, against their neighbors, and, though it is not the most beautiful portion of their history, against the King, their master! But, like the good gentlemen they were, when they were beaten, they could go and earn their bread by the sword elsewhere, and then come back to their old rook. Whereas, if they had been great lords, either they would have fought against fewer people, or

else they would have been annihilated. For riches must be protected by precautions which are not at all to my family's taste."

Such was approximately what Messire Aurèle-Agrippa had to say in praise of his fortune's golden mediocrity. But these arguments should not be taken too literally. The old lord had in times past been avid of the great things of this world, and quite naturally his philosophy had somewhat more of sour grapes in it than of simple and natural conviction.

He had left the old manor at the age of sixteen, and exercised his powers first of all in the Italian wars. He was brave, handsome, and rich, and those qualities go far toward success at Court. At first, his hopes were more than realized, but when the years passed without bringing any substantial token of the royal favor, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa began to perceive that his great qualities must be neutralized by some great defect. He sought the flaw a long time, but could not put his finger on it. A friend of his tried to point it out to him, but the baron flared up and, by killing his friend in a duel, lost his only opportunity of learning the cause of the royal neglect.

The plain truth was the Seigneur Aurèle-Agrippa was as imperious as he was brave, and that he scoffed, teased, and contradicted on every occasion. He was the most stubborn of men, and once he took an opinion into his head, there was no power in the Kingdom, the King's not excepted, could persuade him to relinquish it.

Nor did he make any friends but among warriors, who were ready to excuse his furious transports for the sake of the services he could render. The courtiers avoided him like the quartain ague, and if he had not, through pure luck, found grace in the eyes of Madame Diane de Poitiers, he would never have obtained anything from the Court. But this illustrious favorite, appreciating his real virtues rather than his superficial vices, was pleased to befriend him. She obtained the collar of the Order for him, and as a still greater mark of her favor, strongly advised him to go and live on his estates, because his character was not such as would obtain him any of the greatness he coveted.

Messire Aurèle-Agrippa was wise enough to believe his protector. Returning to his own country, he married. Fifteen days after the wedding, he was living at daggers drawn with his wife, who, after a year of marriage, died, leaving him a son. The old lord always considered this double circumstance the happiest of his life.

It was about this time that he journeyed to court for the last time. He wanted Madame Diane to hold his son over the baptismal font, and she consented to do this with a graciousness which in itself would have won the old gentleman to her, if that had not already been accomplished. As soon as this ceremony had been performed, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa hastened back to his castle with his son Jean. Here, respected by his neighbors for his birth, for his knighthood in the Order, and for

his military experience, he looked forward to a respected old age, such as anyone might envy.

It was then that he began to think of putting to profit the knowledge he had acquired in his travels. The worthy knight had seen much, and his dealings with the honest people with whom he had associated had taught him to see things from a point of view that was not at all provincial. He conceived the great and difficult enterprise of writing, for the instruction of his son and of the public in general, a commentary on the great affairs in which he had taken part. He was greatly encouraged in this project by his parish priest and by the prior of the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Gilles, which was situated a few leagues from his castle.

The old gentleman now entered into a pleasant, mild, and quiet way of life, such as befits old age. Every day he spent some time on his son's education, and another period at the composition of his wonderful work. Every evening, barring unforeseen accidents, the parish priest and the prior came to the castle and were received by the baron at a table as delicately served as was then possible in the provinces. To see these three fine old grey-beards together was to see what quiet happiness in declining years can be. Good old wine scintillated in their glasses; well-stuffed, comfortable arm-chairs, the window open to the perfumed summer evening air, or, in winter, a good big blazing fire, all contributed to making conversation sweet and interminable. Elbows on the table, or with their backs firmly supported by the

tapestry of their chair-backs, they fearlessly followed every alluring avenue of thought. Many a time at these meetings, they completely remodelled the State, and even Europe itself, just as village politicians might do to-day. There were no newspapers to furnish themes for day-dreams, it is true. But news was not lacking. The castle was not so isolated that pedlars did not pass by once in a while, happy to sell, for a moderate price, not only cloth and pins, but also those broadsides, so precious now, in which one might read of the terrible events in Germany as a result of the schism; of the latest atrocities committed by the Turks in Hungary; of the horrible enormities of the Algerian corsairs; of how a child with two heads had been born at Dortmund, in Holland; of how a terrible holocaust had ravaged the famous town of Copenhagen, in the kingdom of Denmark; and other not less memorable events. So Messire Aurèle-Agrippa's years went by. At the moment when this story opens, he had attained his seventieth year, and he saw his son, who was exactly twenty years old, growing up beside him, full of health and strength.

One evening, while the baron and his two old friends were together around the supper-table, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa exclaimed:

"Messires, this evening I will read you the last three chapters of my eighth book, which relate the events of the war of the Piedmont. I make no doubt you will be pleased with it."

"I know that in advance," said the parish priest,

"but M. le Baron, before you begin that useful and very pleasant reading, allow me to speak to you on a subject which I dare say is not less interesting."

"Eh! Eh!" the old gentleman answered. "Are you also composing some learned work on any subject?"

"No. But I must say a few words to you on the subject of your son Jean."

"Ah, now," said the baron, putting his elbows on the table and fixing his eyes on the parish priest, "I confess, Father, that I agree there is considerable to be said on that subject, and, since you have helped me to impart an honest education to my son, it seems eminently suitable for me to consult you about some suspicions . . ."

"Exactly," said the parish priest. "My ideas coincide with yours, and I shall submit certain suspicions I have . . ."

"You think exactly as I do?" the baron answered. "Now you will agree that this is very singular, and that without further research, we can immediately declare that there are some dark things about that young man's conduct, that give me cause to deal very severely with him."

"Just a moment, M. le Baron," cried the prior. "So far my colleague and you have only spoken of doubts and suspicions, and you already hasten to think of punishment? That is going a little faster than justice demands. I have known Seigneur Jean, your son, from his earliest years, and he is an absolutely frank, open young man, who, I dare say, is as good a Catholic as anyone in

the neighborhood, and who, in the final analysis, can never do anything that is not to your honor."

"All that you say is undoubtedly true, my dear prior," cried the parish priest. "But it is no less certain that Jean's conduct is — well, peculiar, and that I have heard strange things said of him."

"But what have you heard?" said the prior.

"Yes, speak, Father, and afterwards I will say what it is that shocks me about him."

When the baron had spoken these words, the parish priest coughed lightly, thrust his head forward toward his auditors, lowered his voice, and said:

"You know, messires and respectable friends, that the most sinister rumors are current throughout the canton, and even all through the province. People who are not lightly disquieted are quite sure that the Huguenots are ready to break the peace, and several peasants have told me that nocturnal meetings have been and are being held in various parts of the country. How is it then that Jean is always on the go, and that at this very moment, that is to say, well after nine, if I may trust this clock, he has not yet come home? That is what I wanted to say, and it seems to me, M. le Baron, that this is a matter worthy of your attention. Everyone knows how clever the heretics are at seducing innocent young souls, and I greatly fear lest the attraction of an adventurous life should have its effect on the spirits of your son, who dreams of nothing but chivalry and the sword."

"He shows good judgment in that," the baron answered, "since his birth obligates him to spend his life under arms. But I confess I had not suspected that he could have thought of turning Huguenot. If I were certain that he had ever entertained that notion, I would throw him with my own hands into the dungeon-keep, which was dug five hundred years ago by the builder of this castle, and which has never yet been used."

"You are going a bit fast, M. le Baron," the prior interrupted, with a smile. "Every sinner must at least be given an opportunity to repent."

"Bah!" said Messire Aurèle-Agrippa. "He would have plenty of time for repentance between those old stones. But it isn't a matter of that, for I do not believe that my son, who has the honor of having Madame Diane for godmother, has ever thought of deserting the Catholic faith. I am always suspicious of him, but not to that extent."

"Tell us your suspicions," said the parish priest. "We may be able to compare them with mine and find the truth."

"Well, Fathers, I believe that my son Jean has dealings with highwaymen."

"Highwaymen!" the two priests cried, in consternation.

"Highwaymen," the baron repeated, "and to speak frankly, I do not think there is anything to terrify you so much in that. At Court, in my youth, I knew some very honest men who had worked a little at that trade

and did very well by themselves through it. There is no better school to train soldiers for partisan wars. However that may be, my son Jean seems to me to keep very bad company, for his servant Pierrot accompanies him on his expeditions."

"I never liked that fellow," said the parish priest.

"His evil conscience shows in his face," said the prior.

"I should have had him hung before this," the baron went on, "if he had not been Jean's foster brother. I do not know why my son is out all day and all evening, and I am afraid that if I treat him severely, I will either force him to even worse things, or else arouse gossip and slander all over the countryside. So I am very much embarrassed, as you see. But I have discovered a more important matter for anxiety concerning my villain of a son. Let me tell you, Fathers, that he assiduously frequents the house of that miserable M. de Castillac!"

"Proof that he leans toward heresy!" cried the parish priest.

"Still greater proof that he has turned to brigandage," the baron interrupted, with the passion that was so natural to him, and which the years had in no way impaired. "M. de Castillac is not a Huguenot; he is an incorrigible highway robber, who knows neither friend nor enemy."

"I am sure of what I say," answered the parish priest. "M. de Castillac may hide his dealings with the leaders of the new religion as much as he pleases, but I know

his movements perfectly, and I know all that anyone needs to know on the subject."

"Don't argue about this any more," said the prior. "Here is M. de la Tour-Miracle, who says our man is a turbulent fellow, and the Father here believes him to be a heretic. Without venturing to pronounce between these two opinions, it seems to be safe to say that M. de Castillac is very bad company for Jean. I hope he has not yet followed any evil counsel; but in any case, my opinion is that he cannot stay here any longer, and that he must be sent away."

"That is exactly the point on which I wanted to consult you," said Messire Aurèle-Agrippa. "I have no desire that my son should turn into a rascal, like those that were turned out in such numbers all over the country by the civil wars we have already lived through. I also think, like the reverend prior, that he must be sent away. But where? There is the difficulty."

"To the Court," said the parish priest. "That is the place for a man like him, and I have no doubt he would make his fortune there excellently well."

"Why not send him to his godmother, Madame Diane?" the prior suggested. "She would probably know what to do with him."

"There is a wonderful idea," said the baron. "I am surprised it did not occur to me. What do you think of it, Father?"

"I think it is excellent."

"Pardieu! I shall write to Madame Diane immedi-

ately; and tomorrow morning, whether he likes it or not, my son will carry my letter to her."

While he spoke the old seigneur had risen and, going to a small table on which stood an ink-stand, he began without a moment's delay to write the epistle which was to serve as the starting-point of his son's career.

At that moment, the sound of firm and rapid footsteps was heard in the corridor.

"Here is Jean," said the prior.

The door of the room opened and a tall young man appeared. His waist was lithe and supple; his great chest told of vigor; his eyes sparkled with vivacity and wit; his lips smiled joyously beneath a thin moustache. He looked like a paladin, a lover, a good companion, like everything that might be wished. But he looked neither like a brigand nor like a gloomy heretic.

As he came into the room, he respectfully removed the plumed hat that hid his forehead, and saluted his father and the two ecclesiastics.

The three old men immediately understood that he had something to say. But he was evidently embarrassed and shy, and for a few moments he played with his plumes and with the pommel of his hunting-knife, unable to find words to express what he wanted to say. But he began at last, and advancing toward his father, with a not ungraceful shyness, he said:

"Sir, I do not know how the respect I owe you demands that I should conduct myself in the circumstances in which I find myself, and I beg you to rest assured of

my veneration, and forgive me if I commit a fault. I come to beg you to permit my marriage with Mademoiselle de Castillac.”

The baron made a gesture of surprise which quickly turned into one of indignation, while the two ecclesiastics — especially the prior, who spoiled his friend’s son somewhat — raised their eyes to heaven in witness to their distress.



II

Jean was More in Love than a Heretic; which Put Him in a Very Bad Position.

MESSIRE AURÈLE-AGRIPPA was too angry to restrain himself. "Wretch!" he cried. "Where did you get the impudence to make such a request? Don't you know what a rascal that Castillac is? Don't you know that the Catholics take him for a Huguenot, the Huguenots for a spy, and all honest people for a bandit? And you dare to come and talk to me about a marriage with his daughter? Why, you rogue, I would rather see you dead before my eyes than son-in-law to a man whose end can be nothing but dishonorable!"

Jean listened with bowed head, in a respectful attitude, which did not prevent him from soliciting the intervention of the two priests with a look. Seeing at last that his father had rounded out his period without any ally declaring himself in his favor, he determined to risk an answer.

"Allow me, sir, to point out to you," he said, in a submissive tone, "that I love Mademoiselle de Castillac with all my heart, and that her virtues are unequalled anywhere, as the reverend prior can testify."

"I will admit," said the good father, "that this young person is very pious, and that she is as respected throughout the country as her father is despised."

"Eh! Sir," said Jean, with the air of good humor that rarely left him, "I have not the least desire to marry the father, but only the daughter."

"Here's an idle argument!" cried Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, stamping his foot. "Do not insist, knave! You shall not wed the person of whom you speak, however virtuous she may be, nor if she were twenty times as virtuous. The matter is settled, and I will not change my mind on that score. So content yourself, instead of dreaming of ridiculous things, with giving me categorical answers to a few questions I shall put to you. Where are you every day, and where do you spend all your evenings?"

Jean lowered his eyes to the floor, bit his lip, and said not a word.

"My dear child," said the parish priest, "this is very serious, and if you are questioned, it is in your own interest. Besides, you may answer without fear, for here are only a father, whose love you know, and two well-tried old friends. Speak, then, and hide nothing."

Jean bowed very politely, but kept silent, and his attitude gave sufficient indication that he was determined not to speak.

"This is a fine situation, indeed, sir!" the baron growled. "You insist on an obstinate resistance, and I will not seek to discover anything more of your mis-

doings. I have resolved to ignore the fact that you consort with brigands, and that you know a man whom all your friends hold in low esteem. It is enough for me to know that you have desired to wed his daughter. Now, this is my will: tomorrow morning, at daybreak, you shall leave for Anet. Here is a purse with all the money you will need, and a letter which you are to deliver to Madame Diane, your godmother. I shall say no more about it. I do not suppose you have any desire to resist. In any case, you may take my word for it that it would be useless, and if you do not leave with good grace, why, by God's body, I shall make you leave! "

Here, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa stopped, to wait for an answer. Jean bowed deeply.

"It is well, sir," said the old man, in a milder tone. "Ask these two gentlemen for their holy benediction, and go to your room. I shall see you before you leave."

Jean went out slowly, and as long as he was near the room in which his father sat, he walked quietly, like a man who goes peacefully to bed. But as soon as he was out of hearing, he began to run, quickly entered his room, locked the door behind him, and ran to the window, which he opened noiselessly.

"Pssst! " he said.

"Here I am, sir," a man's voice answered from the grass, and its owner rose as he spoke.

"Pierrot," said Jean, in a hurried voice, "there is no time to lose. The servants have closed the doors, and I must go out. Have you our horses close by? "

"They are two hundred paces from here, sir, under the trees."

"Excellent! Wait for me."

He ran to his bed, knotted the sheets together with a practised hand, tied them to the window, and slid to the ground.

"Now let us hasten, Pierrot."

"Where are we going, sir? "

"Where the devil do you think I would go, if not to Castillac? "

"Hmm! It's late to be courting ladies; do you know it is past eleven? "

"Past eleven or past twelve, I must see Magdelaine. Are you mounted? I can't see anything in this blackness."

"Yes, sir."

"Let us be going, then! "

The two night riders went off at a gallop. They went on so for a good hour, without speaking. Then, Jean pulled in his horse a little and said to his companion:

"Tell me, if you know, what my father meant by the enigmatic expressions he used this evening when he was talking to me. He accuses me of consorting with brigands! Do you know, I have already had some suspicions about these honest people we have fallen in with once or twice, and with whom you seem so familiar? "

"There is nothing surprising in my knowing them," Pierrot answered, "since they are poor Bohemians who have been wandering about those woods for more than

twenty years. I have known them ever since I was born."

"Your Bohemians have evil faces, my dear Pierrot, and I believe them capable of any wickedness."

"It is their trade, sir. But you know as well as I how polite they have always been to you."

"I do not deny it. Do you happen to know also why my father absolutely insists that that good fat M. de Castillac is a scoundrel?"

"That's an easier one," said Pierrot, with assurance, "and I have often told you myself that he has acquired a very evil reputation. For the last month, it has been supposed that he is a Catholic spy, and that he has betrayed the Protestants, whose friend he was in the war."

"At least," said Jean, "he betrays in a good cause. When I am his son-in-law, which I shall be in the end despite all opposition, I shall easily instill better sentiments into him."

"You, sir?" Pierrot answered. "That's a funny notion! M. de Castillac, I swear to you, was born a traitor and will die a traitor. All the lectures you might read him, were they as eloquent as the sermons of Monseigneur the Archbishop himself, would not affect him in the least."

"Come now, Pierrot," said Jean, shrugging his shoulders, "are you going to line up on the side of the old people? You understand that I don't include my father in such an expression, for I have a very deep respect for him."

"I'll grant that you respect Monseigneur the Baron," said Pierrot, "but at the same time, here you are abroad at night, in defiance of his orders. If I were in your place, and had means to live honestly, I should not make love to Mademoiselle Magdelaine, since you have been forbidden to do so."

"My poor Pierrot, I cannot help it. Love holds my heart, and struggle as I might, I could not escape its power."

Here Jean sighed deeply. He sighed, but in no morose and disagreeable *De Profundis* fashion. He sighed as befitted a handsome, brave, and intelligent young man who has only good thoughts in his soul, and who never abandons hope even for the best of reasons.

Pierrot did not answer his master. He never on any occasion dared to contradict him. He loved him greatly, having sucked at the same breast, and though he was considered a crafty, knavish, and bold blade in the surrounding villages, he was as mild and innocent as a young girl when he was with Jean, and constantly gave him the best of counsel — which his young master, as in the present instance, did not always accept.

It was a marvelous autumn night: clear, fine, and warm. The stars twinkled pleasantly, and it was glorious to be off on an adventure in the silvery moonlight, which shone calmly on the leaves of the trees, on the bushes, and here and there on the pebbles which were scattered along the road, much more abundantly than the horses,

whose hooves now and then struck sparks from them, might have wished.

Jean pulled in his steed when they arrived close to a gnarled old oak and could see the top of a pointed tower, over and beyond a copse of trees. Pierrot followed his master's example.

"I confess," said Jean, "that now I have arrived at the end of my journey, I scarcely know what to do next."

"As a matter of fact, sir, why have you come to Castillac?" Pierrot asked. "Surely, you cannot be thinking of seeing Mademoiselle Magdelaine this night?"

"That is just what I want to do," said Jean de la Tour-Miracle. "My father intends to send me away tomorrow morning, and God knows when I will return. I absolutely must see and speak to Magdelaine."

"How will you get to her, sir?"

"By way of her balcony, and if I can believe the novel-writers, I shall not be the first lovelorn cavalier who will have chosen that way. Only, I confess I am afraid she will take fright, or be vexed. But still, I cannot resign myself to obeying my father's orders without making at least one attempt to secure for myself a more desirable destiny."

"Ah, sir!" said the faithful servant. "Don't do anything so mad, I beg you. If you enter this young lady's room at this hour, and if you are seen, do you not know her father has the right to shoot you as though you were

a fox, and that if that should happen, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa himself would swear it was well done, even while he mourned you? ”

“ You give me courage, Pierrot,” said Jean, jumping down from his horse and tying his bridle to a thick branch.

“ At least have patience, and wait until I have seen if there are not by chance a few Bohemians in these woods, who might be useful to you in case of danger.”

“ Master Pierrot, you have some associations which displease me, and of which I will ask you to give me a fuller account, some day when I have the time. Let your Bohemians sleep, and follow me.”

Pierrot bowed his head, dismounted, and tied his horse beside his master's.

Jean crossed the road, followed a scarcely discernible path through the grass, and came to the foot of a great wall covered with moss and parietary. Without waiting to admire these pretty plants, since a lover is only at times a botanist, Jean put his right foot in one hole, his left hand in another, pulled himself up to the top of the wall with some effort, though it was not very high, and, going through the same movements, but reversed, on the other side, descended into the garden that surrounded the Castillac manor. Pierrot had been as agile as his master.

“ Now,” said the servant, “ here we are in the jaws of the wolf! ”

“ Now let us see,” said Jean, in a low voice. “ Where

are we? Magdelaine's room is in the tower on the right. Come this way."

The two adventurers soon found themselves under a narrow window, at which Jean stared fixedly.

"I am afraid of frightening Magdelaine," he whispered. "What shall I do?"

He thought a moment, and then began to sing in a low tone. He had not gone half-way through his song when a light was seen in the room. The window opened cautiously, and a sweet, frightened voice exclaimed:

"In Heaven's name, what madness! Do you not know that my father is fearful that his enemies may surprise him, and when he is here spends the whole night patrolling everywhere? Go away! You have no idea of the dangers that you brave!"

"If it is dangerous to love you, dear Magdelaine," said Jean, "it is even more painful. Allow me to take heed only of the pain!"

"Ah! Go away, I adjure you!"

"No, not for a whole empire!" Jean answered enthusiastically. "Not until you have told me that you love me, and that you allow me to aspire to your hand!"

"I will not say it," answered Magdelaine, "for I know your father would not have me for a daughter."

"You are greatly mistaken. My father has no such sentiments."

"I am not mistaken," answered the trembling, girlish voice. "I know the motives which would dictate the baron's refusal, and I honor them. Think no more of this

futile passion. And if ever you have had any feeling of esteem for me, go away. You are ruining me, and risking your own life."

"Ungrateful one!" Jean answered, angrily. "Is this the reward of such pure and impassioned tenderness? Who will ever love you as I do? Why do you close your heart to me?"

"I can never be yours," Magdelaine answered, in a faint voice.

"I have come to prove the contrary to you. My father wants me to go away at dawn, not to return perhaps for years. Well, if you want to follow me . . ."

"How unworthy!" answered Magdelaine. "Go, M. de la Tour-Miracle, or I shall call my father myself."

"Well, call! I shall call him myself," cried the lover in a loud voice. "Since you will not love me, since you will not follow me, I shall have the pleasure of being killed beneath your window, and we shall see whether you will sleep the better for it."

"By all the devils, sir," said Pierrot, suddenly injecting his word into the conversation, "do not trifle thus, for I have just heard something move among the trees of the orchard, and we can expect a couple of balls to come out from among them, addressed to us. Come away. Since Mademoiselle will not listen to you, you must wait until another occasion to convince her."

"Dear Magdelaine," cried Jean, paying no attention to his servant's quite legitimate fears, "since you want me to go, at least say a few words to give me hope. What

would you have me do, if I go away convinced that you are indifferent? I would a thousand times rather be dead. Answer me, I beg of you. Do you love me? ”

There was a moment of silence, while Jean eagerly waited for an answer to his question. Pierrot, on his side, listened anxiously as though he thought he heard M. de Castillac’s terrible footsteps on the sand of the pathway.

At last Magdelaine answered, in a firm enough tone: “No, Jean, I do not love you. I can only love my husband, and you shall never marry me! ”

No doubt Jean would have answered this hopeless declaration with another demand, which would have called for another answer, and so on, as conversations of that sort generally go, but suddenly the vigilant Pierrot seized his master’s arm, exclaiming:

“This time I am not mistaken, sir. Here is M. de Castillac, less than fifty paces from us. If you are not armed, we are lost, for I have only my pistols.”

“I have my sword,” said Jean, tranquilly, “but I am in no way troubled, for I am decided to let myself be killed like a lamb, since Magdelaine will not love me.”

“Madman, fool that you are,” cried Magdelaine, in desolation, “what is the use of this bravado? I love you, but hide yourself.”

“Ah! You have said it at last! You love me! Have you considered that I will remind you of it before long? ”

“Yes, yes! I love you! But fly! ”

Jean bowed deeply, then joyously cramming his felt

hat down over his ear, he looked about him to find a way of retreat. He saw immediately that it was too late. M. de Castillac stood ten paces from him, with a musket in his hands. He was a short, heavy man, with a pimply red face and false and cruel eyes. But he seemed to be prodigiously strong.

“Eh, eh!” said he, looking at the young man standing in the moonlight. “I am not mistaken, it is M. Jean de la Tour-Miracle, who takes advantage of this fine night to come and pay court to my daughter. That is not bad taste,” he continued in the same bantering tone, shaking the burning match of his musket. “Unfortunately, I do not like people who run about at night, and when I find them on my place, I have a habit of dealing out prompt justice to them. Good night, young sir. You did not want to sleep in your bed tonight, and I will send you to another, and I am certain in advance that even your own father will highly approve what I have done.”

After speaking these words, M. de Castillac lifted his musket to his shoulder and aimed it at his victim. Jean watched him proudly, and without paling.

Magdelaine screamed.



III

*Jean's Situation Goes from Bad to Worse; until
an Unexpected Circumstance Suddenly Im-
proves It.*

MDE CASTILLAC was about to fire. A sturdy arm reached forward, tore the musket from his hands, sent it flying through the air to alight on the damp grass. Jean was no less surprised than M. de Castillac, whose face was distorted with a mixture of astonishment, fury, and fear. But Jean was relieved when he recognized Pierrot as the author of this diversion.

When Magdelaine's angry father appeared, the servant had dodged to one side, and although his presence had not escaped the musketeer's attention in the first place, the sight of Jean, and the charitable desire to put a sudden end to the terrestrial existence of this seducer had allowed the disappearance of Pierrot to pass unnoticed, since he had so far played a very minor rôle in the action. Instead of making his escape as another servant might have done, Pierrot had slipped up behind M. de Castillac and had not hesitated to intervene.

The lord of the manor stood there, disarmed, in the

presence of a young man whom he had been about to put to death, and of a servant who was doubtless ready to obey his master's orders. It was enough seriously to frighten a warrior who was by nature more ferocious than brave.

But Jean did not give his prospective father-in-law much time to think unpleasant thoughts. Seeing him disarmed, he gallantly took off his hat and came toward him.

"Pardon this ruffian's misdirected zeal for my safety, sir," he cried. "If I have been so unfortunate as to displease you, I have merited a thousand deaths, and it would do me infinite honor to see you end my days. But allow me to say, nevertheless, that I have attempted nothing to displease you here. I love Mademoiselle your daughter, it is true, but I love her as she deserves, with an ardent desire to become her husband."

"I find it difficult, sir, to accept your protestations of faith," the lord of Castillac answered. "Besides, I am not unaware of the fact that Messire Aurèle-Agrippa is my enemy, and only too willingly makes himself the mouth-piece and echo of calumnies which are spread about me."

"Allow me to remain neutral as between two persons whom I profoundly respect. I swear on my honor that in coming here my sole intention was to say farewell to Mademoiselle your daughter, who treats me quite inhumanly, and I repeat that my only desire is to obtain her hand."

M. de Castillac seemed to be thinking about what Jean

had said, for a moment, but as a matter of fact he had quite other ideas in his mind.

"This young man will never win his father's consent to this union," he was thinking, "though it would suit me perfectly, in view of the fortune and high birth of the family of La Tour-Miracle. He will never be my son-in-law. It would therefore be an excellent thing to have him as a prisoner. The scandal would be quite to my advantage. I would demand a heavy ransom, and when the old baron slandered me, he would not be believed, as it would be notorious that he was my enemy as the result of a matter in which the right was on my side."

M. de Castillac stepped forward a few paces, and said, in as pleasant a tone as he could muster: "Come! After all, I am not displeased that this fine lad prevented me from shooting you. I believe you when you say that what you have done was more foolish than wicked, and that we may be able to come to an understanding. If you will wait here a few moments, I will go saddle my horse, and fetch the key for the garden gate, and we will go out together and talk about this business."

"Willingly, sir," said Jean.

The crafty lord of Castillac went off, begging him again to wait.

"I don't like this at all!" Pierrot whispered, when the master of the house was gone.

"What do you fear?" asked Jean.

"Many things. I know the man with whom you are

dealing and it would greatly surprise me if he were not plotting something to your harm. My advice would be to go back over the wall and home, as quietly as possible."

"I think you must be jesting. Do you think that, for the sake of imaginary fears, I shall renounce my happiness just at the moment when it seems possible that a way obtaining it will open up? No, no! I will do nothing like that! The only unpleasant thing is that since her father appeared on the scene, my dear Magdelaine has retired from her window, and I fear also from her room, since I see no light there."

As Jean finished this speech, the light appeared again, and Magdelaine leaned over the sill, exclaiming:

"My God, Jean! Enough of this madness! My father is rousing and arming his people. He has sent for the peasants from the village. You will be captured, if you do not flee."

"Did I not say so?" Pierrot cried. "Come, let us go."

"I stay," said Jean. "M. de Castillac might accuse me of cowardice, and then I should lose my dear Magdelaine. No, no! I will not allow two such misfortunes to happen to me, and especially not both at the same time."

While he was speaking, men armed with halberds and muskets, but mostly with pitchforks, appeared at every opening through which anyone could have escaped from the garden. It was a major mobilization.

"This is getting serious," said Jean.

Pierrot tore his hair. Magdelaine had disappeared.

The heir of La Tour-Miracle promptly decided what he would do, and telling his servant to follow him, he climbed up a trellice to Magdelaine's window, which was not more than ten feet from the ground, Pierrot after him. He jumped into the room with his servant, ran to the door, locked it, and pushed all the furniture in front of it to make a barricade.

"Now we are in a position to parley," he said, "for we cannot be attacked except through the window. Give me one of your pistols. We will only fire as a last resort."

At that moment, the besieging band, with the lord of Castillac at its head, arrived at the foot of the wall, and stood there stupefied, contemplating the desperate manœuvre and resolute air of the two adventurers.

Meanwhile, the conversation between Messire Aurèle-Agrippa and his friends had gone on at the castle of La Tour-Miracle, and each had said his say on the subject of Jean's peculiar obstinacy in refusing to confess where he spent his time.

"Of a certainty," the parish priest had said, "this mystery is seriously disquieting; for your son, M. le Baron, is as a rule confiding enough, and much too good-humored to keep a secret. As for me, I greatly fear that there is treachery abroad. I say that, because I am sure of it. The poor Kingdom of France is soon going to be like a ship tossed by every wind. Sinister rumors are about. Heresy is raising its head. In many places, the Catholic inhabitants have been beaten or insulted. I am con-

vinced that the people of the religion are about to essay a new revolt, and I fear that Jean may have allowed himself to be persuaded to join their guilty course."

"Think what you please," answered the venerable Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, with spirit, "but for the sake of our long-standing friendship allow me to tell you that you understand nothing of all this; which is not the fault of your intelligence, but of your vocation. Since I have learned that my lad is in love, my only anxiety on his account is to send him away, and promptly, not only to keep him from doing foolish things, but to keep him out of danger as well. I know how evilly disposed M. de Castillac is toward me, and should my silly son fall into his hands, I fear that my enemy would harm him, and so avenge himself on me through him. Believe me, Fathers, when a man is in love, and I know it by experience, however good a Catholic he may have been, he will still resist heresy the harder. What is heresy, I ask you? Is it a great insanity?"

"The greatest and saddest of all insanities," the parish priest answered, shaking his head in melancholy manner.

"Well, love is as great an insanity, and once it has taken hold of a young head, it leaves no room for any other madness. And so you may be sure that my son Jean is not a heretic, nor even tempted to become one."

"Well, for my part, I believe you," the prior answered, rising, "but the hour is late, and I think, sir priest, it is high time that we went home."

"No doubt, no doubt! I believe that Messire Aurèle-

Agrippa is about to offer us his hospitality, but tomorrow is a feast day, and our duty calls each of us to the flocks that are entrusted to our care. I would nevertheless have liked to say goodbye once more to that little Jean whose birth I attended."

"I confess I had the same desire," said the prior.

"Nothing could be easier than to satisfy you, Fathers. We will send for my son."

"Not at all, not at all!" cried the parish priest. "Your servants are no doubt asleep, for our conversation has dragged out very late, and Jean himself will have gone to bed. To wait until he had the time to get up and dress again would take too long. So we will go and surprise him in his room, if you please."

"Have it as you will, Fathers," the baron answered, "though it seems to me you are doing a very great honor to a miserable young scapegrace who little deserves it, especially at this moment."

The baron had taken up a silver candlestick, and went ahead of his guests to light the way. So they came to Jean's room, and the father finding the door locked, battered it down without further ceremony, finding what there was to find: that is to say, an empty bed, and the sheets hanging down to the foot of the wall.

It was a moment of great astonishment. The two good priests who had lived, one in the cloister's deep repose and the other in the peace of a rural presbytery, had difficulty in realizing that love could carry a young man to the point of making him commit such enormities.

Messire Aurèle-Agrippa found the fact easy to understand, but saw in it a defection in the obedience due to him. He turned purple with anger, and in a low voice uttered exclamations which he was prevented from emitting with suitable energy by the presence of his venerable friends. At last he could contain his anger no longer, and he allowed it to explode.

"The gallows-bird!" he cried. "I can easily guess where he has gone, and I am going there to fetch him back."

"Where is he?" asked the prior.

"At the Castillac castle," the father answered, "and God knows what this flirtation may have brought him! A shot in the groin, perhaps! Faith, but that would please me!"

Messire Aurèle-Agrippa ran quickly down the stairs and to the stable, followed by his two friends, who were resolved not to abandon him in this emergency.

Still growling, he wakened his servants, had them saddle his horse and the two ecclesiastics' mules, and went off in great disorder, forgetting to tell his people to follow him, and swearing that what he most ardently desired was to find his son crippled for life.

Such was the state of the baron's disposition, which the parish priest and the prior in vain attempted to soften, when he set out.

Dawn was breaking when the venerable troupe appeared before the castle of Castillac. As a consummate warrior, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa wanted to attack the

enemy cautiously so as not to be taken by surprise himself, and the three friends advanced softly, leaving their mounts behind them. They found the garden gate wide open, and the garden occupied by half a score of peasants who, pitchforks in hand, stood guard under a window in which the two beleaguered adventurers appeared, each with a pistol in his hand, and swearing by all the gods that they would break the head of the first churl foolish enough to dare to scale the wall.

Aside from that the garrison, though few in numbers, seemed to take the siege good-humoredly. Jean laughed as he threatened, and Pierrot exchanged voluble jests with his assailants, which, if they did not do much honor to his taste, at least gave evidence of his gallantry.

Despite his anger, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa took pleasure in this scene. He smiled in his beard to see his son so debonair in the face of danger.

"Forward, fathers," he said, "and let us deliver these two knaves who, I promise you, need expect no indulgence from my paternal weakness! Corbleu, when my son is out of the hands of this rabble, he will be in mine, and will not be much better off!"

While he spoke, the baron had advanced a few steps, and, not deigning to put his hand on his sword, he cried in a thundering voice to the peasants:

"Get out of the way, knaves, and allow this gentleman, who has the honor to be my son, to come peacefully down from that embrasure, into which he was doubtless led by treachery, like the simpleton he is! If

you oblige me to come closer to you, I warn you that my hand is heavy! ”

“My dear, good friends,” the parish priest hastened to add in a more conciliatory tone, “obey the baron. You cannot fail to gain by doing so. You know that our holy religion forbids all violence. How deplorable it would be if any misfortune should occur here! Allow this young gentleman to join his father, and if he has committed some fault, you may be sure he will be punished. It is not necessary for you to have a hand in it.”

The peasants, recognizing the Baron de la Tour-Miracle and the two priests, had — whether out of fear of the former’s well-known rage or from respect for the ecclesiastical habit is of no importance — made a definite movement of retreat. The baron, delighted with his success, was about to order his son to come to him, when suddenly a frightful noise came from the room occupied by Jean and Pierrot. It was the barricaded door falling before a few good axe-blows. There was a musket-shot or two, and Jean and Pierrot, forced out of their retreat, jumped down into the garden, beat down with a sword stroke and a blow from a stick two peasants who did not get out of their way as quickly as the others, and ran to take refuge behind a thick elm which could serve them as a rampart for a few moments, if not against their too numerous enemies, at least against the balls which, fired from the window, buried themselves in the wrinkled bark of the protecting tree.

When the smoke cleared, the traitor Castillac and

three servants, all four armed with still-smoking muskets, appeared in the window.

"Bravo, Jean!" cried Messire Aurèle-Agrippa. "Hold fast, my child, and let them come!"

And disregarding his age, he strode over and ranged himself beside his son, sword in hand.

It would be difficult to describe the disorder that reigned in this erstwhile peaceful spot. The two peasants whom Jean and Pierrot had knocked down may not have been very badly hurt, but they howled terribly. Their comrades, exasperated, seeing what a small number of men they had to deal with, brandished their pitchforks and shouted to arouse each other's courage. The parish priest and the prior prayed, supplicated, threatened, and talked of excommunication. And at the window, M. de Castillac, surrounded by the pick of his forces, at first stood open-mouthed, as his formidable fire, instead of ridding him of at least one enemy, seemed to have added to the number of his opponents a combatant whom he was delighted to have in his power.

In a loud voice, he ordered his men to reload their weapons and his own.

"My pistols are useless," said Jean, woefully. "Have you yours, sir?"

"No," Messire Aurèle-Agrippa answered. "We are going to have a bad quarter of an hour, but let us put a good face to it. After all, they may not hit us!"

This hope was not likely of realization, for if the balls had not lodged in their target the first time, it was

only because the elm had received them in its armor, and now the peasants were advancing to dislodge the Tour-Miracles and to force them to come out of cover. Castillac and his men waited expectantly, ready to fire. The prior and the parish priest, seeing that their efforts were useless, resorted to cries and lamentations, when suddenly deep, brusque voices were heard, crying:

“ Stop! Stop! Or you are all dead men! ”

At the garden gate a troop of horsemen, well mounted and armed, appeared. At their head was a splendid lord, with swarthy face and a proud eye, who did not seem in a mood to brook any contradiction.

No sooner had M. de Castillac cast his eyes on the newcomer than he turned very pale, and turned up the muzzle of his arquebuse. His henchmen followed his example.



IV

In which Some Very Doleful Events are Related.

HE leader of the band of horsemen who had so opportunely intervened in the affairs of Messire Aurèle-Agrippa and of his lovelorn son was a fine-looking man of at least forty. His curly black beard, his shining, proud, and fearless eyes, and his hard, swarthy color showed clearly enough that here was no boudoir warrior. On the other hand, his thick, frowning eyebrows, tight lips, and fine nose, hooked like the beak of a bird of prey, indicated plainly that he was not a man with whom to jest. His helmet and armor were richly damaskened, and about his neck hung the collar of the King's Order. He was evidently a considerable lord.

In his following were four or five gentlemen. The rest of his band was composed of soldiers, servants, and two fellows with a gallows look about them, the sight of whom seemed to produce a terrifying effect on the villagers, who suddenly began to run.

"God's death!" the leader of the newcomers cried to them. "As sure as my name is Montluc, I gut the first to move a foot, and on the spot!"

Messire Aurèle-Agrippa had not waited to hear the old soldier give vent to this characteristic expression to come toward him.

"Ah! M. de Montluc!" he cried. "Allow me to embrace you for the great service you have just rendered to me and to my son. Without you, I believe these miserable fellows would have wickedly killed us!"

"Sir," the terrible Gascon captain answered, "you may be sure that I am happy to do a good turn to an honorable old friend. I have never forgotten you since the time of the Italian wars, and I am the more delighted at having done you a service, in that I am going to need your assistance."

"You have but to ask, M. de Montluc," cried the lord of La Tour-Miracle. "Eh! Is it not for life or death between us, since the siege of Sienna, which you must surely remember?"

"Morableu, do I remember!" answered Montluc, with a smile. "But that is not what brings me here. Captain Fleurdelys," he said, turning to one of the gentlemen in his suite, "have M. de Castillac, his servants, and these peasants come forward, and bind the latter. It will be easier to question them that way. For," he added, turning back to Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, "your affair, my good friend, is, I imagine, but one more proof of the great calamities that are being plotted in treasonable holes against the Kingdom of France."

The Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle heard these last words in some astonishment. He had good reason to be-

lieve that the danger he and his son had run was easy enough to understand without seeking any better reasons than he knew of himself, and he admitted to himself that if M. de Castillac had been a little hasty, that could not very well in good conscience be reproached against him.

Great was his surprise then when he saw Montluc suddenly jump down from his horse, stride furiously up to Castillac, who was being led up by two soldiers, and shake the poor man vigorously by the collar, shouting:

"Felon! Traitor! Do you dare to appear before me, after having supplied me with all those false reports for the last fifteen days? Know you not, knave, that in my life I have strangled with my two hands upwards of thirty rascals who were worth more than you?"

M. de Castillac was as pale as a sheet, and so long as the terrible Montluc shook him, he made no effort to speak. But when the removal of the captain's iron hand allowed him to regain his equilibrium, he cried out in pitiful tones:

"I assure you, Monseigneur, that you are mistaken about me, and that I could not foresee what has occurred."

"Speak out, curse you, and make yourself clear!" cried Montluc, and added two or three more oaths. "You can say what you wish before these gentlemen, and even before these churls, since the harm is already done! You must know, M. de la Tour-Miracle, that the Huguenots are in full revolt. They have taken up arms

everywhere, and the life or liberty of the King, of the Queen, and of all the Catholic lords of the Kingdom are in the greatest danger. Do you understand? They want to massacre us all. And there are some good people whose first thought, in the execution of this fine plan, was for your humble servant! But they are mad, if they think they will catch me napping! Here is M. de Castillac, who has written me every day for a month that he is watching the people of this region, and that he is sure that they are innocent. So how does it happen that this morning I hear that Montauban has risen, and that Lectoure is about to be surrendered by its governor, Fontrailles?"

The baron and the two ecclesiastics were completely astounded by this terrible news. Even Jean for a moment forgot his love. A civil war was a matter of such consequence, and had such an effect on little as well as on great things, that it was impossible to remain indifferent. As for M. de Castillac, he was paler and more troubled than ever. He looked about him, like a man who is about to say farewell to this earth, and he evidently sought some justification. Time was precious, for M. de Montluc was waiting, and evidently losing patience.

Finally, M. de Castillac made a great effort.

"Monseigneur," he said, "I am absolutely innocent. But I was mistaken. These people hereabouts are quite as crafty as devils, and must have discovered that I have the honor to be one of your most faithful friends. Moreover, they were able to hide their plots from me, and I only discovered them last night. I swear to you by all the saints, I

was desolate, seeing myself thus caught in the net, and especially so that, not knowing where you might be (for you are a great traveler), I was unable to inform you immediately, as I should have done, of what I had just learned. I foresaw that someone would undoubtedly know how to inspire you with unjustified suspicions about me. Now that you are here, although I know that you are well aware of everything, I am certain that I shall be able to give you some interesting details which will destroy your suspicions of my good faith! ”

“Pouf!” said Montluc. “Let us hear your report quickly then, you horrible old babbler, for I am anxious to know whether I shall hang you or not, and I might be willing to wager there is not a single true word in all that you have said so far.”

“You will be able to decide on that last immediately,” said Castillac, heaving a sigh of relief. “You need but send two of your people with one of mine into the castle dungeon, and they will bring you back someone whose testimony will completely establish the truth of what I say.”

“So be it,” Montluc answered. “Captain Fleurdelys, go into the dungeon with two soldiers, and bring back whom you find there.”

The anxiety of those present was great. Captain Fleurdelys, followed by his men and preceded by a servant, went into the manor. Everyone was silent, waiting expectantly for their return, but before they re-appeared, Magdelaine de Castillac came out of the castle and with a

timid but firm air, not looking at her father, Jean, nor the Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle, came up to M. de Montluc, and having curtsied respectfully, asked his permission to submit a few remarks on the matter on which he was about to pass.

M. de Montluc had frowned when he saw a woman coming. He was swearing between his teeth, but when Magdelaine had come up to him, he bowed to her, saying:

"Speak quickly, Mademoiselle, for we have no time to lose."

"Monseigneur," Magdelaine answered, "I fully understand how unsuitable my presence is here. But a compassion which you will no doubt admit is well-grounded, and not only compassion, but a love of justice, force me to intercede in behalf of an unfortunate person . . ."

M. de Montluc was waiting until she finished, before answering, but Castillac, flushed red with anger, strode up to his daughter and took her by the arm.

"Go in, Mademoiselle," he said. "You have nothing to do with men of war, and when M. de Montluc acts in the King's service, no one may dare advise him, especially no such conceited jade as yourself."

This brusque interruption did not disconcert Magdelaine, who merely threw a reproachful glance at her father, and continued to address Montluc.

"We are perhaps at the beginning of another civil war, Monseigneur, and it would be worthy of the Catholics to give a good example by extending clemency."

"It seems certain now," said Montluc, rubbing his hands together, "that we will have to hang someone."

"Monseigneur," Magdelaine went on, undaunted. "I am a good Catholic, and I know that these reverend fathers will tell you as I do, that murder is not pleasing to God."

"It is true, Monseigneur," said the parish priest, coming forward, "Christ our Saviour taught mercy, and his wonderful example should always be followed."

At this moment, Captain Fleurdelys, his soldiers, and the servant came out of the manor, dragging a prisoner with them.

He was a man of about thirty, but there were gray streaks already in his luxurious brown hair. His lips were thin and his look was gloomy. He was dressed all in black.

"Your name?" Montluc asked, brusquely.

"Gaspard Lescout, of Montauban," the captive answered, coldly.

"Your profession?"

"Minister of the Holy Gospel."

"Marvelous! I prefer to hang the trumpets and flags of the enemy, rather than the muskets. How do you happen to be here?"

"It is that infamous Castillac who persuaded me yesterday, at our conventicle, to come and hide myself in his house. I was to preach this morning before a great number of the faithful who are in arms."

"Well, you are preaching now, just as I promised you," said Castillac, laughing.

Montluc thought the jest was good, and looked with more favor on the servitor whose good faith he had suspected.

"M. de Castillac," he said, "I am a little hasty in anger, and I ask you to excuse me. Where did you seize this ugly masquerader yesterday?"

"At a meeting held two leagues from here, Monseigneur. I am sure that there are a good number of Huguenots met there now, to march upon Lectoure."

"Ah! By the devil's horns!" said Montluc, leaping up on his horse. "We must hurry. How many are we?"

"We were thirty when we came here," said Captain Fleurdelys.

"Do you come with us, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa?"

"What a question!" the old baron answered. "I would go to the end of the world to fight the enemies of my King and of my faith, and especially when you command. But if you will pass by my house, I will arm myself and my son will do the same, and we will find six brave fellows, mounted, to come with us besides."

"It is half a league out of the way," said Castillac.

"It is no matter," said Montluc. "Besides — you, my friend, you are not leaving us?"

"No, Monseigneur, and I bring three servants, mounted."

"Praise God!" the Catholic leader cried. "We are more than enough to exterminate every Huguenot and every evil-thinking man in the Kingdom! And by the

way, Castillac, and you, old friend, you were quarrelling. I hope you will shake hands? ”

“ Faith, sir,” said the Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle to old Castillac, who came forward eagerly. “ I confess I do not love you. But since I am in the wrong on my son Jean’s account, and since besides the King’s business comes before all else, I give you the accolade willingly on condition that there shall be no question of marriage between our two families.”

Jean turned lovelorn eyes on Magdelaine. But the young girl paid no attention to what was going on. Absorbed in horrible presentiments, she was contemplating the Huguenot preacher with an air of profound pity, and tears coursed down her pale cheeks. For a moment, Jean hoped the young lady’s eyes would turn to him, for she was looking in his direction; but he soon saw that he was mistaken. Magdelaine sought the eyes of the parish priest, and when her glance met his, she seemed to be earnestly trying to attract his attention. The old priest quietly came toward her and led her to the prior, who had remained in the background throughout the scene. There, the two ecclesiastics and the compassionate young girl conversed softly, but earnestly, together.

None of the others paid any attention to them.

“ Come, gentlemen! ” said Montluc. “ We have no time to lose. Captain Fleurdelys, set those peasants loose. Now go, my good friends, my brave churls. I am very glad not to have to chastise you. Act so that we may never have any but friendly dealings. Con-

duct yourselves always like good loyal subjects of the King! Now go, knaves — you have nothing to do here.”

The villagers did not wait for a second command, and the least agile among them disappeared, running like deer, into the woods.

“Let us hasten, gentlemen, let us hasten,” said Montluc. “And you, my children,” he continued, addressing himself to his followers and the soldiers, “bring me my two comrades.”

Those whom the captain called his “two comrades” were the same two men whose gallows faces were remarked upon at the beginning of this chapter. Their profession was to fasten others to the gibbet.

These two pleasant persons quickly dismounted and appeared before Montluc, their sleeves rolled up, and each one holding a keen cutlass in one hand and a bundle of new ropes in the other.

Montluc stroked his chin like a gourmet about to decide between two flagons of different vintages. The cutlass tempted him, but his innate partiality for the rope carried the decision this time.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “there is nothing more pleasing to the eye than a good hanging. Preacher, my friend, I suppose that you will object to receiving the counsels of these venerable priests. It is useless, therefore, to speak of it to you. But at the same time, I do not want it said that I prevented you from being converted. Will you confess? ”

"No, tyrant," the minister answered fiercely, "and I accuse you before the tribunal on high! "

"Poor devil!" Montluc answered. "I am a good Christian, and will make a better showing there than you. Come on, Jacquot; come on, Mitaine — tie his hands behind his back and get to work. Here is a fine oak branch! It seems to have been grown here for the purpose."

The two executioners approached their victim, who looked at them with a somewhat wandering eye, white-lipped, but smiling disdainfully and holding his head high. Nearly all of the witnesses of this scene had attended too many others like it to be troubled by it. Captain Fleurdelys adjusted his cloak about his shoulders, not thinking of what was happening at all. The Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle, whom all this reminded of his youthful days, took a very apparent interest in the operation. Jean and Pierrot were the only ones who showed any disturbance. But in spite of our hero's youth, it would be quite mistaken to suppose that he was as disturbed and shaken as a man would be in our day under similar circumstances.

He was not used to it, that was all.

Jacquot climbed the tree dexterously. Mitaine put the cord about the unfortunate man's neck and threw the end to Jacquot, who turned the fatal hemp about the branch. Mitaine pulled; Jacquot jumped on the shoulders of the minister who had been thus lifted into the air; the poor fellow's neck cracked, and a violent con-

vulsion of his legs announced that the operation was over.

“ Well done, my boys,” said Montluc. “ And you gentlemen, and you my children, dig your spurs into your horses’ bellies. In two hours I want to know whether Huguenots can stand up before good Catholics, and in four whether Lectoure is really taken.”

Having thus spoken, he galloped off with his troops and new recruits.

Only Mademoiselle Magdelaine, the prior, the parish priest, and the hanged man remained.



V

*An Attempt is Made to Bring the Dead to Life;
Followed by a Relation of Jean's Warlike Ex-
ploits, Worthy of His Birth.*

HE sound of the horses' galloping had scarcely died down in the distance before the parish priest drew a short-bladed knife from his pocket, trussed up his skirts, and with the prior's assistance, clambered up the tree. He cut the hangman's rope, and the swinging body fell heavily on the greensward. Magdelaine hastened to bring out medications. The prior, who was a bit of a surgeon, a bit of a physician, and very charitable, hastily sought some spark of life in the body that lay at his feet. But neither Jacquot nor Mitaine had ever bungled in the performance of their task. Their redoubtable master often expressed his recognition of that fact. The poor minister, in spite of the patient efforts of these three good souls, remained another proof of the efficiency of Montluc's executioners.

All their efforts were fated to be useless; and when they could no longer hide this from themselves, the parish priest went off to bring back the peasants to dig Gas-

pard Lescout's last resting place. Much eloquence was necessary to persuade the churls to give proof of their good will. The labor of mercy was peculiarly repugnant to them, for they feared to be taken for Huguenots themselves, some day, and themselves have to deal with Jacquot and Mitaine.

At last, in spite of all their fears, a few *ecus* distributed by Mlle. de Castillac restored courage to the bolder ones among them, and the preacher was given Christian burial. The prayers prescribed by the Church for those who are separated from her were said over him, and the day was already well advanced when these pious duties were ended at last.

"My Fathers," Magdelaine said to the two ecclesiastics, "you both seem to be very tired. Allow me to offer you hospitality for a little while. I have given orders for the preparation of a repast which will doubtless be unworthy to set before you, but which may help you to regain your strength, if you deign to accept it."

"Thank you, my girl," said the parish priest. "The reverend prior and I have hardly time to stop anywhere. Our monks and our parishioners must have become strangely disquieted by our absence, and seeing the sudden conflagration which has broken out over the country, they must doubtless believe that we have fallen into the hands of the Huguenots, as this unhappy Gaspard Lescout fell into the power of the Catholics. But before we leave you, we have a few little questions to ask you."

As he spoke these words, the priest smiled good-humoredly, and the prior, who was a few paces away, guessing his friend's thoughts, came closer to Magdelaine, who, not knowing what might be the purport of these questions, was somewhat surprised.

"Speak, Father," she said at last. "I am all ready to answer you. What is it about, and how may I be of service to you?"

"Tell us frankly, my girl," said the parish priest, "what you think of the affection with which Jean de la Tour-Miracle seems to pursue you. Do not blush, but only answer sincerely. I have known you too long and too well, ever for a moment to suppose that you might have taken any step of which you might have cause to repent. But who knows how far a weakness of the heart may go? Have you not listened to the heir of Messire Aurèle-Agrippa more than you ought?"

Magdelaine bowed her head with that modest confusion which such questions always inspire. The good priest, in his rustic innocence, was not learned in maidenly wiles, and very nearly became impatient when he saw that he would have to wait for his answer.

But Mlle. de Castillac soon recovered her composure, and though she spoke in a low voice, she made herself clearly understood on every point as to what was to be thought of the love that Jean had conceived for her.

"A few months ago, Father," she said, addressing the parish priest, "M. Jean de la Tour-Miracle came here

with a certain Pierrot, who is his servant, and who has business with my father."

"What!" the prior interrupted. "A servant of the Baron de la Tour-Miracle can keep up connections with a man whom his master, rightly or wrongly, considers an enemy?"

"It is not for me to pry into the conduct of M. de Castillac," Magdelaine answered, somewhat proudly.

"You are right, my child," the parish priest answered. "At the same time, I cannot avoid sharing the prior's surprise and anxiety. This Pierrot is a man about whom some pretty bad things are said, and I fear that he may have drawn Jean's inexperience into sad ways."

Magdelaine looked at the priest with a sad and doubtful expression. A clever observer would have thought that the desire to go deeper into this new problem at that moment overbalanced her will to silence on the subject of her father's misdeeds. However, whether cold reasoning and still colder duty won out over a more tender sentiment, or whether Magdelaine herself was ashamed of what she had thought, she did not say what was on the tip of her tongue, and contented herself with allaying the priest's suspicions as well as she could.

"What I know," she went on, "is that Jean, in coming here, brought no sort of project whatever. Usually it was on his way home from the hunt, and while Pierrot talked with my father, he rested on the bench in front of the house, fondling his dogs and jesting with those who

happened to be around. For M. Jean is well liked by all the peasants, to whom he has been very good and very friendly."

"I know that, my child. But after all, this jesting with the peasants did not concern you, and I cannot yet see where love came in."

"M. Jean," Magdelaine continued, humbly, "soon ceased to occupy himself with his dogs and his servants. He talked only to me. He never came here without bringing me a thousand curious things. Often, even — as I learned by chance — he spent whole evenings prowling about the manor, and at last one day he told me that he loved me."

"And what did you answer, my dear girl? In answering this question, be even more frank than in the other matters, if that is possible. For you see, this is the important point. I have always known you to be so pure, so noble-hearted, that I would not for a moment doubt whatever you may tell me."

Magdelaine hesitated a little, but soon went on in a firm tone.

"I knew what I had to do. The sudden declaration troubled me at first. I did not expect it. I had not thought that it need ever come. Perhaps also, in my ignorance of the sentiments of him who spoke to me, I had taken too much pleasure . . . I speak to you as to my confessor here, Father, and I have no fear on account of the presence of the reverend prior, either."

"Go on, my girl," said the other. "So far, there is

nothing in what you say which does not endear you to your old friends."

"Well, I had no doubt taken too much pleasure in seeing this young man. He told me — well, many things that I have forgotten. I know what my position is, and what a sad future is reserved for me. For two years, I have not thought of the world any more, for I could never again appear in it without blushing. So I could have no hesitation as to the proper answer to make to M. de la Tour-Miracle. I told him that I did not love him."

In speaking these words, and recalling this still too recent memory, Magdelaine felt her heart tighten, and her strength leaving her. But she controlled herself, and there was no outward sign of her emotion, excepting a certain pallor which spread over her face.

"That answer," said the parish priest, "was as positive as it could be, and our madcap doubtless took it ill. What did he say to you? He no doubt tried to shake your resolution?"

"He said many foolish things, which I do not remember," Magdelaine went on, with a melancholy smile. "He swore he would know how to make me love him, and he left saying he would return soon. Since I did not tell him what motives I had for my conduct — they are only too well known besides, though he is ignorant of them — I fear that he may carry out his purpose of asking my father for me. If he commits this error, it will be one sorrow the more for me. There will be no more rest in this house, and M. de Castillac will not fail to declare war

on the Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle, to force him to consent. Happily, M. Jean has not yet told me that he has done anything in that direction."

"M. Jean is the greatest fool alive," the parish priest answered. "But he will not torment you any further, my girl, not from now on and for a good long while at any rate, for he is going away today, and his travels will doubtless distract him from his present thoughts."

"M. de Montluc may want to keep him in the country," said Magdelaine, almost without thinking.

"Let us hope not. But goodbye, my child. I am happy to leave you as wise and as worthy of yourself as I have always known you to be. Do not torment yourself, and have no anxiety for your future. They say your father is going away, and in view of the bad times that will ensue, you cannot remain here. The prior and I will think about you. We shall see you again before long, and I have no doubt you will be glad of what we shall have to tell you."

So the conversation came to an end. Mlle. de Castillac kneeled to receive the benediction of her pious friends. Soon she found herself alone again.

She went up to her room, and stood pensive a moment, contemplating the disorder that pervaded it. A sad smile played about her lips, while two tears ran slowly down her cheeks. One of Jean's pistols lay on the floor. She picked it up, looked at it for a few moments, and pressed it to her bosom. Then, as though ashamed of what she had just done, she suddenly began to set the furniture

in order, with a great show of activity, humming a dance-tune the while.

The task she had set herself was soon accomplished. In less than no time, everything was in its place. The village blacksmith came to set up the door that M. de Castillac had had battered down, and when night fell there was nothing to indicate that the manor and the garden had seen that morning the tragic events that have been related; a siege in miniature, a combat, and the hanging of a man. Magdelaine, returning to her usual solitude, went to sit in the embrasure of a window, and no doubt revery, a dangerous and desolating revery, was about to take possession of her, but she repulsed it by taking up her missal, and began to read and pray fervently.

Meanwhile, two leagues away, as Castillac had told M. de Montluc, a troop of Protestants had met that morning, in a sort of a clearing, surrounded on all sides by woods and thickets. They sat or lay on the ground in a circle, holding their horses by the bridles. Most of them, gentlemen and burghers, were clothed in full armor, and shod with great buffalo-hide boots. Several wore casques. Others wore only felt hats ornamented with feathers. The soldiers held long lances or arquebuses in their hands. Their chests were covered with iron breastplates. All these people listened intently to the words of a minister, armed cap-a-pie as were they, who with open Bible in his hand, energetically preached his text.

“My brothers,” the preacher cried, “you are like to

Gideon and his soldiers! Gideon is M. de Veninac. Show yourselves good warriors, and do not dally with your tyrants! You know well how the Hebrews exterminated the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Amalekites! Take care in your turn, that not one enemy escape you, for that one alone would be enough to create a new brood of persecutors, just as a single seed of couchgrass suffices to cover a whole plain, and to stifle the good seeds. Above all, I adjure you, my brothers, to give no quarter to this Babylonian nobility! Do you know from whence comes the purple for their cloaks? It is the blood of the saints! Since the Medicis, the Guises, and all their crew will not obey the edicts, and will continue with their plots, the last hour has rung for them! I tell you that the Angel of the Lord has appeared to me. In his right hand was a halberd, in his left a trumpet! He said to me: 'Arise, Theophile Oudart, and go with my elect, for I have given you the whole kingdom of France!''

This harangue fell flaming upon the ears and hearts of an audience made up of people who already burned with zeal. The band that was met here formed an assembly similar to others all over the Kingdom, and was to join others like them in other parts of the country in a march on Lectoure, the treason of whose governor promised them entry.

When the preacher had ended with his sermon, M. de Veninac, the big, chubby soldier who had been compared to Gideon, stamped his foot with an oath that was not at all Hebraic, and declared that it was time to be going.

"If M. de Fontrailles has kept his promise to us," he cried, "there is nothing to keep us from setting out, for we will go into Lectoure as a man goes into his bed. Rest easy, sir minister, all the Catholics will soon be turning in their accounts. I, Barnabé de Veninac, give you my word for that, and from the consuls of the city to the last little child, not one will escape to prohibit the preaching or ever to torment honest people."

An approving murmur answered this fine promise, and each Protestant cavalier prepared to mount. They were all adjusting their bridles or tightening their girths when a soldier who had been posted to keep watch ran in crying:

"On guard! The Romans! They are galloping toward us furiously!"

"So much the better," said Veninac, straddling his horse and turning him quickly about. "We will send them to their grandfather, Satan!"

The troop was quickly drawn into formation. All were on horseback, the minister as well as the others. These Huguenot soldiers were good warriors, having already served elsewhere, and knew every point of a fight, a skirmish, a *melée*, or a battle. At the same time, when they saw the Catholic troop approaching, although it was somewhat smaller than theirs, there was a definite movement of disquietude in their ranks.

"Captain," one of the gentlemen said, "this meeting will not be pleasant, I believe. For unless I am as blind as a bat, that is Montluc himself galloping at the head of these marauders!"

"Hmm!" said Veninac. "I believe you are right, but since Montluc is not afraid, I see no reason why we should be."

Captain Barnabé here spoke from the bottom of his heart. He was an old brave, not particularly fanatic, for as he himself said, he was not very well versed in theology, but a great pillager and a good servant of the Queen of Navarre.

"Come, my friends!" said he. "Let us not wait for the shock of Montluc's attack, but let us run to meet him. The attacker is always the victor."

The Huguenots shook themselves, levelled their lances, or prepared to fire their arquebuses.

But the Catholics spared them a good half of the road. Jean, covered with a fine suit of armor which had belonged to his father, galloped joyously beside Captain Fleurdelys, and paid close heed to the good advice which the old cavalier gave him, in brief words, while they galloped.

"Come, young man, don't run too fast! You'll get there, you may be sure! Look well to your lance! Set it at the right height. Hold your horse! Ah! A hundred thousand devils! Don't lose control!"

Jean carried a whole world of agitation in his head and heart. All cavaliers of ancient times, and all his ancestors, had their eyes fixed on him from the sky, at the moment when, as he did not for a moment doubt, he was about to perform a great exploit. Full of pride and emotion therefore, he galloped on with his brigade. Besides, as may well

be believed, the image of Magdelaine was constantly before him.

The two bands met bravely. The musket fire did little damage in the Catholic ranks, but several Protestants dropped from their horses. Montluc cried: "Forward! Forward!" and the valiant chieftain accompanied every cry and every imprecation with great strokes of the sword, distributed right and left with unmatched vigor and valiance. Neither did Captain Fleurdelys and the others spare themselves.

After a few minutes, there was none who did not see his own blood flowing. Broken arms, cracked skulls; the festival was complete, for either side showed equal courage and tenacity. At last Veninac realized that resistance was useless, and that in spite of their superior numbers, his people must yield to Montluc's fortune. The brave Protestant had a firmly established reputation for energy and valor. He did not stop for childish considerations here, and desirous of conserving his strength for a better occasion, he gave the order to retreat, and held back his assailants alone. Jean leaped toward him at the moment when he turned about to rejoin his people, but this audacious move did not succeed. With a back-stroke vigorously applied to the young man's casque, Captain Veninac threw his adversary to the grass, and went galloping off, thumbing his nose at Montluc.

"Here's a brave little man," said the Catholic captain as he passed beside Jean, who was being lifted to his feet by a soldier. "Messire de la Tour-Miracle, your son does you honor today!"



VI

Jean Mistakenly Allows His Courage to Run Away with Him, and Is Thrown into Great Embarrassment in Consequence.

HE Maréchal de Montluc was pleased with Jean, and Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, while conserving the haughty and ceremonious manners which a father must discard but rarely, smiled to let him know that he shared the general's opinion. The troop had set out immediately in pursuit of the Protestants. It was Montluc's system always to strike terror into the hearts of his enemies, and prevent them from rallying. Besides, as the fugitives fled in the direction of Lectoure, the Catholic troop was only keeping on its way as it galloped in their tracks.

Jean, followed by his faithful Pierrot, pursued the vanquished soldiers with no less energy, but much more foolhardiness, than his companions. Soon, following a horseman who seemed no better mounted than himself, and who was not much distance ahead of him, he completely forgot to keep within reach of his own band, and found himself following a network of hollow roads,

from which he would have had difficulty in finding an exit. He heard the shoes of the horse he was pursuing pounding on the road not twenty feet ahead of him, and, sure of catching up with the soldier, he obstinately kept his spur in his horse's belly, determined not to return to his band without having put the seal on his glory by capturing a prisoner.

At last, coming to a small clearing in a thick wood, the Protestant horseman turned about, walked his horse back to Jean, and took his hat off very politely.

"My dear sir," he said, very graciously, "I thank you very much for the willingness with which you have followed me. You are my prisoner!"

Jean found the jest unpleasant, and made a fearful thrust at the jester with his sword; but the Protestant made the weapon fly out of the enthusiastic warrior's hand with a neat back stroke, and went on:

"You are not yet prepared to meet every parry, my young cock. But see, it is useless to resist. You have nothing to do but to surrender."

At that moment, Jean, stupefied, heard lamentable cries behind him, and saw Pierrot thrown from his horse, disarmed, and surrounded by soldiers who seemed to be only waiting for an order to thrust a dagger in the poor servant's throat.

"Of whom have I the honor to be prisoner?" said Jean, lowering his head hopelessly.

"Of Captain César de Bourbet, sir," the gentleman answered, "and I am sure you will not be displeased with

me, if only you will give me your word not to attempt to escape."

"I shall certainly not do so," answered the heir of La Tour-Miracle. "Your people have just been beaten by M. de Montluc, and I have no doubt that in an hour or two I will find occasion to regain my liberty."

The captain came closer to him and lowered his voice:

"Hold on, M. de la Tour-Miracle," he said, "— for I recognize you by your resemblance to your brave father — if one of our ministers were here, he would have answered your bravado by having a few balls put into your head. But I am not a great cleric, and I only remember that I served in your good father's company of men-at-arms. So keep you still, and be sure you shall not escape. Your Catholics have marched on Lectoure. My opinion is that they will take the city before Fontrailles has a chance to give it up. So I won't go there. I'll be on my way to Orleans, where I will rejoin the Admiral and the Prince de Condé, who sent me to follow the opening moves of the affair here. So you see what you must decide to do. If you seek to escape from me, I shall no longer protect you, and it would be unpleasant, at your age, to have to go to see whether the Protestants or the Catholics are right."

Jean, stubborn, found his defeat hard to swallow. He answered only with an ill-humored gesture, and on Captain Bourbet's order, two soldiers came forward, tied the arms of the recalcitrant prisoner, securing his horse's

bridle to their own with two cords. Then they blindfolded him.

When this operation was finished, the captain gave orders to march without delay, and Jean remarked that, as nearly as he could judge, they went toward the north.

The Protestant troop into whose hands Jean had so unfortunately fallen in no way resembled a mustering of insurgents. It was not numerous, but well mounted, well armed, very military, and composed entirely of German soldiers, called "reiters." They marched very diligently, and only one stop was made, to rest the horses and take some nourishment.

Captain Bourbet approached Jean laughingly, during the halt, and offered him a glass to drink and a bite to eat.

"If you were not so obstinate," he told him, "I would have the bandage taken from your eyes, and your arms untied. But you must understand, my good friend, that in bringing the Admiral news of a minor defeat, I must at least bring him an important prisoner, which you have had the goodness to make it possible for me to do. I cannot, therefore, make myself too sure of you."

Jean did not answer, and soon they were on their way again, in silence as before.

It is superfluous to say that our hero's thoughts were sad, and that he damned his folly heartily. But of what use were his regrets? He tried hastily to conjure up a plan of escape. But he was quickly convinced of the uselessness of his attempts. His guards were at least as clever as he. A simple movement he attempted, as if to shake the

cords that bound his hands, drew from his guard on the left a "*Der Teufel!* Mofe not, mine chentleman, or I fill preak dein pack! "

The words were not friendly, and the hoarse, brutal voice that pronounced them was even less so. He was obliged to endure his fate with patience, and to await a more favorable opportunity for escape. Besides, Jean did not know what had become of Pierrot. During the halt, he had coughed ostentatiously to signal him. But Pierrot had not answered. For the moment he could not discover whether his good servant was dead, or whether he was being brought along by another road. He was desolate at the separation.

Besides, he soon began to feel very tired, and nothing is so fatal to courage in a young heart as physical lassitude.

A freshness which was beginning to steal through the woods imparted a certain uneasiness to his body, fevered as it was by anxiety. Night had fallen, no doubt, or was about to fall, and the prisoner wondered, not without anxiety, if his captors intended to make him travel thus until and beyond the next morning, without any rest.

He had gone through these scarcely cheerful reflections over and over again in his head, when, from fatigue, he fell asleep on his horse. Suddenly his horse stopped, and he heard about him other mounts pawing the ground, and soldiers whispering.

A moment later, the rattle of spurs let him know that some horseman had alighted, and then he heard knock-

ing at a door, and the door opening, followed by a low-voiced colloquy. The preliminaries lasted a good quarter of an hour. At last he clearly heard an order to dismount, and immediately he was lifted from his horse and carried, still bound, into the house. He was taken into a small room, which, as far as he could make out from the hollow sounds, was unfurnished. He was made to sit on a chair, and then, instead of his hands being loosened, his feet were tied also, and he was left there. He heard the key turn twice in the lock.

“The devil!” thought Jean. “It seems that I shall not escape this evening.”

A good hour passed thus, and Jean went sound asleep. In spite of the inconvenience of his situation, he dreamed that he was escaping, and that he was marrying Magdelaine. It is a sign of a strong soul, to have good dreams in adversity. He was watching himself at the foot of the altar, exchanging rings with his beloved, when a rough, but friendly voice, Captain Bourbet’s in fact, spoke to him, not in his dream but in reality.

“Come, sir, you are being untied. Come to supper!”

“My dear Captain,” said Jean, put into a better humor by his dream, “there is no refusing, and if you allow me to rest at ease, I promise you, if the supper is good and the bed also, to keep you company until tomorrow morning.”

“That is proper talk,” answered César de Bourbet. “Take the bandage from the gentleman’s eyes.”

The bandage fell off immediately, and Jean found

himself in the presence of five or six soldiers, the captain, a young man whose cold, severe air did not particularly please him, and a decidedly attractive young lady. In spite of his love for Magdelaine, and in spite of his incomparable fidelity, he could not help saying to himself at first sight: "Here is a very beautiful young person!"

She was, in fact, a ravishing creature. She was fairly tall, and well shaped. She had very small feet, hands white as snow, like two jewels; a brow that was not high, but smooth and the color of ivory not yet yellowed by time. Her hair was black, thick, and wavy; her nose was Roman; her half-open mouth disclosed pearls pleasantly set in coral. And her eyes! Description is powerless to do justice to her eyes! They were like those mirrors which bird-catchers vibrate before birds. And, to add to all this perfection, she possessed unequaled grace of gesture, and a delightful good-humored expression, that tinted her cheeks with rose.

Jean de la Tour-Miracle, it must be confessed once more, was charmed at first. But afterwards, he was somewhat dazzled. He looked more than a long time at this divine apparition which came to make up to him for the darkened world in which he had lived all day. Soon the dark young man put an end to his contemplation, speaking to him haughtily and impatiently.

"I am sorry, sir, that I must become your host against your will. But rest assured that my house is yours, in so far as my devotion to our holy Protestant cause permits.

If you will honor me by sitting down to my table, I suggest that supper is served."

"I do not suppose, sir," said Jean, not particularly impressed by this arrogant tone, "that I can offer you any excuses for forcing myself on your hospitality uninvited. I will eat the supper which I do not owe to your benevolence, without scruple. We might more wisely agree to remain good friends without putting on airs, or offending with ill-chosen words."

The master of the house bit his lip and made no answer.

Captain Bourbet had already offered his arm to the young lady, and all went from the small room into a great hall, where a table was set for four. Two old domestics, as crabbed-looking as their master, served the men, and a pretty servant-girl in Béarnese costume stood behind the green-velvet arm-chair on which the young lady sat. On the beauty's right sat the captain, on her left the prisoner, and opposite her the young man in black who, Jean soon understood, was her brother.

"Madam and sir," Captain Bourbet cried joyously as he poured himself a drink, "do not be astonished if M. de la Tour-Miracle and I do little honor to the conversation, at the first. You know our various adventures. He, victor, and prisoner, and I vanquished and yet . . . But here is my captive's brow turning dark. I will stop. Let it be enough to say that after having seen and done so many incoherent things in one day, one has at least every right to be extremely hungry."

Jean had set himself to work shamelessly, and the captain was soon rivalling him with great zeal. There was, however, some difference in the way each proceeded. For while César de Bourbet's attention was equally divided between a pasty of young partridges and the bottle, Jean, paying assiduous court to an enormous leg of mutton and a flagon of Spanish wine, found means to say a few suitable words to serve as prelude to the conversation he planned to open with the young lady when his stomach's clamorings should have been somewhat appeased.

There is no better situation to attract the heart of a woman, than being a prisoner. Misfortune or a romantic situation take the place of spirit; and, contrary to the ordinary ways of life, in which one must always strive to make oneself interesting — a sometimes difficult task — the interest is all prepared in advance, powerful, lively, attracting; and if a cruel lady should have no more than curiosity in her soul, still that curiosity would all be directed toward the prisoner. Moreover, prisoners who have found themselves in the presence of ladies, have generally found occasion to bless their bonds, often to see them fall off, sometimes even to regret them.

Young as he was, Jean grasped this truth at once, and found conversation an easy matter. While Bourbet supped like a wolf, laughed, and jested with the good humor of a man who has made a fine capture, the young man in black seemed plunged into the deepest meditation. As for the young lady, she was already quite at her ease with Jean. The waitress' costume called forth a few ob-

servations on the customs of Béarn, from the gallant prisoner, and the lady showed herself sufficiently learned in them for him to suppose she must be one of the suite of Queen Jeanne d'Albret. He would rather have liked to ask a few questions on that subject and on a few other points, but he felt that the ground was not quite sure. Besides, the lovely person, her eyes fixed on her brother, with a fearful expression, kept the conversation well in hand, and did not give Jean a single opportunity for indiscretion.

They talked, therefore, of the new modes, of the best way of wearing *barrettes* or ruffs, and of the verses of the fashionable poets.

The lady spoke highly of Ronsard; Jean did not dislike Du Bartas; both united in praise of Du Bellay. In short, they got along well together, and La Tour-Miracle dared to risk a detailed eulogy of his neighbor's perfections, a delicate subject, which the manners of the times, however, allowed him to treat. Jean was too open-hearted a lad not to have in his nature something of Spanish gallantry. He made good use of it, and the conversation was going along at its best, to the satisfaction of the two who took part in it, and of Captain Bourbet, who saw no harm in it, when a soldier came in and whispered in his chieftain's ear.

"Bring this peasant in," the captain cried. "Have I any secrets from M. de la Tour-Miracle? It will be a long time before he is in any position to make reports to old Montluc! Bring in your man."

Immediately a peasant, covered with sweat and dust, was brought in. The knave pulled at his bonnet and addressed the young man in black.

"The Catholics this morning captured our good minister, Master Gaspard Lescout, and hanged him to a tree. They were commanded by Monseigneur de Montluc, Captain Fleurdelys, and the Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle."

The young man in black cried out frightfully, and rose in a fury, throwing back his chair and clenching his fists.

The young lady covered her face with both hands, crying "Horrors! "

Captain Bourbet remained seated, his eyes fixed on his host, and Jean, not knowing what might happen, remained dumbfounded.

It was evident that the villager's words had produced a stronger impression on those present than could have been expected merely from news of one of those brutalities which were so common at that time, and affected by both parties.

The young man in black came towards Jean with a terrible look. For a few moments he seemed to be making vain efforts to extract sounds from his throat, but at last he cried in a choking voice:

"Wretch! You are in the power of the brother of Gaspard Lescout! "

"That is possible," Captain Bourbet answered, rising in his turn, "but he is my prisoner, and you shall not touch a hair of his head."



VII

Jean Makes the Best of His Situation, and has the Misfortune to Pass His Sword Through the Body of a Charcoal-burner.

PIERRE LESCOUT showed not the slightest inclination to retreat before the captain's declaration.

"Sir," he said to him, "I believe you to be too honest to dispute a just vengeance with me. This man here is my poor brother's murderer, and since I have the luck to have him in my hands, it would be black wickedness to take him from me."

Jean did not believe it any longer necessary for him to remain a passive witness to a scene that had become so interesting to him. He glanced at the young lady, who looked at him with much less ferocity than Pierre Lescout, and derived new hope from this semi-benevolence.

"Take care, sir, that you do not become a murderer yourself. What that rascal of a peasant came in and told you so unseasonably is not altogether true. I cannot deny that your brother was put to death in my presence, but my father and I were there only as witnesses, and not as judges. It is Monseigneur de Montluc who did everything

at his own good pleasure, and I have enough sins of my own without shouldering those of the Marshal, which must certainly be much greater."

"I'll give my word," said the captain in conciliating manner, "that this young man is sincere in what he says. I understand that the death of the minister is a sorrow to you, but believe me, everything is forgotten in time. Bah! And if a man has been hanged, it is a misfortune which must not be doubled by hanging another for no reason."

The deep philosophy implicit in this answer did not appear to satisfy Pierre Lescout. He struck the table furiously.

"Captain, I summon you to deliver your prisoner to me."

Bourbet became impatient.

"By all the horned devils, you shall not have him! Besides, I cannot understand you, my dear friend. A minister is dead, and it is a misfortune, but there are still many preachers, thank God, and I shall not deliver a man to you, whom I count on presenting to the Admiral."

He seized Pierre Lescout by the arm, dragged him into a corner of the great hall, and talked with him for some time in lively manner.

Jean took advantage of this diversion to turn to the young lady. She had already about dried her tears, and she played pensively with the fringes that hung from the arm of her chair.

"I am very sorry that you should be related to Master Gaspard Lescout," said Jean, to open the conversation.

"I am his sister, sir," she said, "but," she added, "it is a long time since I have seen him, which does not prevent me from regretting him so much that I shall weep for him the rest of my life."

And she dropped a few tears. Jean was much more moved by this more or less problematic pain than by the dark despair of the brother.

"Madam," he cried, "I swear to you by all that I hold most sacred, that I am absolutely innocent in the matter. I beg you to believe me."

"If I did believe you, sir, it would do you no good. My brother would act as he will none the less. Since the captain has taken your part, I believe that you are safe!"

"So much the better," said Jean, "but I do not deserve your hatred."

The young lady looked at him with a very sweet air, and in spite of what he owed to Magdelaine, he quite forgot that in the same room a debate for his life or death was going on.

"What is your name, madam?" he asked in a low voice.

"Corisande de Peyrecave," Lescout's sister answered. "And my husband is equerry of the Prince de Béarn. If ever you go to the Court, we shall meet again, unless . . ."

The beautiful lady did not pronounce the end of this sentence as sweetly as she had begun it. On the contrary,

she rushed through it, and her face took on an expression of somber sorrow. Jean immediately understood that the captain and Pierre Lescout were approaching.

"Since you have no common sense," said Bourbet, "and since nothing can convince you, by God's Blood, I will act sensibly for you."

He struck the floor sharply with the heel of his great boot, and two soldiers came in.

"Take the prisoner into the stable, make him a bed in the straw, and allow no one from this house to come near him. Besides, I will follow you, and keep watch myself. And you, M. de la Tour-Miracle, you have given me your word not to attempt to escape until tomorrow morning. I count on it, and in your own interest I advise you to keep it."

The two reiters made a sign to Jean to follow them. After bowing deeply to Corisande, who did not make any response, but seemed to be completely absorbed in misery, he obeyed. In the stable, he threw himself down on two bales of straw and began to reflect on all that had happened to him.

"What a variety of events has occurred to me since yesterday morning!" he said to himself. "Yesterday evening I was a prisoner, and I thought I had reached the peak of unhappy fortune, and here I am now, in danger of a miserable death, and for a crime which I did not commit! This Bourbet is a very magnanimous gentleman. I shall be profoundly grateful to him all my life. And the lovely Corisande . . . and if I had not sought

to abduct Magdelaine, I should not know Montluc, nor Bourbet, nor this beautiful lady! I should not have seen any hanging, nor any combat; I should not be in danger of my life, and at this hour I would be quietly sleeping in my room, in my father's castle."

Jean's thoughts began to wander. Quite naturally, he compared Corisande to Magdelaine, and though he was determined to remain faithful unto death, he could not prevent the comparison from turning altogether to the advantage of his new acquaintance. To do our hero justice, this conclusion did not please him in the least, and when he perceived the trick his mind was playing on his heart, he was deeply grieved. But the harm was done, and nothing remained to him but to throw himself on the transcendent virtues of Mlle. Magdelaine. On this territory his love found more solid footing, and could strut at leisure.

He was plunged in these rather motley meditations on his death, his life, his captivity, and his loves, when Captain Bourbet entered the stable. The brave officer was anxious, and he came and sat beside Jean in meditative fashion.

"My good friend," he said, "For your sake I sincerely wish that animal Gaspard Lescout had gone elsewhere than in your presence to get himself hanged. At this moment, I can protect you from his madman of a brother quite easily, but I will not hide from you that I have only ten horsemen with me, and that every Huguenot in the country will be at our heels. I am not

known in the canton, and in defending you, I greatly risk being taken for a Catholic myself, and that would be a bad business."

"You argue very well, captain," answered Jean, who, as may be seen, had a clever mind for finding the good side of catastrophies. "I can see only one remedy for this, and that is to give me the key to the fields. You will thus be rid of me, and while you go peacefully on your way to rejoin the Admiral, I shall go home to my father's."

"You forget, my dear child, that we marched diligently yesterday, and made good time. You are very far from home. The whole country is up in arms for the Protestant cause, and you would not go half a league without being taken and killed. What we must do is go without delay, before Pierre Lescout has collected enough people to prevent us."

"I am ready," said Jean, "but I shall not renew my word to you not to escape, when day comes."

The captain shrugged his shoulders and left his prisoner. In a few minutes, everything was ready for departure, the horses saddled, and the horsemen booted and harnessed anew. They came up to Jean, put the bandage back over his eyes, and the cords on his arms, hoisted him on his mount between two guards, and off they went at a good clip.

It was a journey very similar to that of the previous day. Not a word was spoken above a whisper. It was evident that Captain César de Bourbet knew how to

maintain strict discipline among his men. He was obviously an able man, this captain.

Jules César de Bourbet was a gentleman of Picardy, of an ancient but poverty-stricken family. While still young, he had enlisted in the army for service in Italy, and his bravery and quick intelligence had brought about his promotion to the rank of ensign. Tossed about by the events of the war, from one place to another, he had served in Hungary against the Turks, in Germany against the heretics, and had returned to France with a reputation for intrepidity and strategy which made him a valuable man to whoever was able to obtain his services. In the first civil war, he had been attached to the service of Connétable de Montmorency; in the second, he was in the hire of the Admiral and took the side of the Huguenots. That is to say, his religious opinions were floating assets, and arguments of dogma affected him much less deeply than the allures of rank, favors, and money.

The interest which the brave captain had shown in Jean was not rooted solely in the memory of a former friendship for old Messire Aurèle-Agrippa. Bourbet held on to his prisoner chiefly because he thought that in announcing the defeat of their plans upon Lectoure to the chiefs of the Protestant league, in his own interest, he could not accumulate too much in the way of consolation. He was already charged with fairly good news. The risings were well organized, and the Huguenots were arming everywhere with unexampled zeal. But it did not displease him to bring with him besides the heir of one of

the most notable of Gascon families, who, if he were to turn Protestant, could be a great asset to the cause. Now to change from one religion to another was as common in those times as changing from one party to another, and Bourbet did not doubt that the rank of ensign in M. de Coligny's guards, or in the Prince de Condé's light-horse troops, would conquer any conscientious scruples a young man might have. He counted on drawing some honor and much profit from his recruiting.

That was why the magnanimous César de Bourbet held on to his prisoner.

They were going along over hill and dale, and day was beginning to break, when Jean suddenly felt that the troop was stopping. The horsemen began to talk among themselves in loud tones, a remarkable infraction of discipline. But Jean could not understand what they were talking about, since among themselves, the reiters only used their German jargon. A few energetic French curses revealed the captain's presence to him.

All at once the bandage was taken from his eyes, and Bourbet gave him back his sword.

"Come, Master Headstrong," the officer said, "Defend yourself! It is for your sake that we are going to allow ourselves to be exterminated. For that matter, I am as mad as you, or I should have surrendered you. But I find it hard to give up something once I have set my heart on it."

Jean took his weapon eagerly. He looked about him and saw that his escort was in battle array. About two

hundred paces away, a band of horsemen, evidently hostile in intent, were running towards them with bridles hanging loose. If there had been any doubt as to their disposition, it would have been promptly dissipated by the presence of Pierre Lescout, mounted, and at the head of the band.

Jean looked about to see whether he could find Pierrot, but he was not in sight.

"Come now, sir," said Bourbet. "Show us what you can do."

"I intend to," the young man answered proudly.

He ran his eye over the country-side, and did not recognize it. Its nature was different from that which he had seen in Gascony. It was a mountainous country, full of ravines, and deep woods.

When the assailants came within range, they fired, but struck no one. The reiters, on the contrary, wounded five or six of their enemies, and drew their swords. The *melée* was lively, but the numbers were too unequal, and Bourbet found himself wounded in the arm and face and thrown from his horse, with the point of Pierre Lescout's sword pressed on his throat:

"God's Body, sir!" he said. "Take the prisoner, since it cannot be helped, but you will be called to account for having dared to stop me on the road in this manner."

"That is my affair," the Protestant answered. "I hope my brother's assassin has not been killed!"

"We cannot find him among the dead," said one of the old domestics who had served at table.

"Nor among the living either, so far as I can see," cried Bourbet, bursting into laughter. "It seems that my prisoner was not anxious for your company."

"Seek him, my friends, seek the wretch!" said Pierre Lescout, quickly. "He cannot be far away. I beg you, by my brother's memory, find him!"

The Protestants set to work in obedience to their young leader, and Captain Bourbet, half consoled for his own discomfiture by theirs, remounted with six men whom he found still standing. He did not dally to look if the others were quite dead or merely wounded, but departed immediately.

The Huguenots scattered, searching thoroughly in every nook and corner. They found nothing. The ground was hard and showed no tracks. The woods were deep and abounded in hiding-places. After seeking all day, the Huguenots met again at last in a clearing which had been agreed on beforehand. Each gave the same word: "Nothing seen, nothing heard, nothing found!"

Pierre Lescout, taciturn and morose, briefly thanked his friends for their help, however useless, and left the forest with them. Little by little everything became quiet once more. The sound of footsteps died away and nothing was heard but the rustling of the leaves in a light breeze, and the chattering of birds.

Then the reeds that filled a little river running through the woods were parted, and a man's head came cautiously through, agitating the trembling heads of the aquatic grasses. It was Jean.

In the very beginning of the combat, without bothering to defend his guards, he had slipped down from his horse, and reached the forest without being seen. Sure that the victorious party, whichever it might be, would want to recapture him, he had not adjudged it necessary to give either one this satisfaction, and, to make more sure of his escape, he had resigned himself to spending the day in water up to his neck, hidden in the grasses. No one could have found him there without inspecting every reed in the river, one by one, and a month would not have sufficed for such a task.

When night had fallen, Jean took counsel with himself, and thought of seeking a hiding-place that would at least be dryer. It was then that he came out of his hiding-place. When he came out on the grassy bank, he reflected that his armor, besides being uncomfortably heavy for a pedestrian, could only compromise him. So he detached it piece by piece, filled it with heavy stones, and, not without lively regrets for the fine damascene work with which it was covered, dropped it to the bottom of the stream.

This done, he found himself in a leather doublet, with his morion on his head, and his sword in his hand. Very sadly then, reflecting that he had neither breakfasted, dined, nor supped, but still thinking of Magdelaine, and a little of the lovely Corisande, he began to wander through the woods, with infinite precaution.

Jean was very ill at ease when he came on a little vine-covered cabin. He approached it cautiously and sought

some crack in its mud wall, through which he might reconnoiter the place. While he was absorbed in this operation, he suddenly felt a blow, then a cold pain running along his shoulder, and a harsh voice crying:

“ Ah! Brigand! Have the Guises sent you to kill me? ”

Jean jumped backward, sword in hand. Facing him was a great rascal of a charcoal-burner, armed with a long knife, who jumped at him to bury it in his vitals. But Jean fainted, and the big charcoal-burner lay on the ground, transfixed by the gentleman’s blade. He cried out lugubriously:

“ You have saved the Lorrainers! ” and he closed his eyes like a dying man.

“ Faith,” said Jean to himself, “ it is better to kill the devil than to be killed by him. What did he mean by the Guises? ”

Without going any more deeply into the problem (for he had better things to do), he entered the cabin which had so bravely passed into his possession. Inside, he found a great loaf of black bread, a piece of pork, and a flagon of brandy. He devoured the lot, like a starved man, and prepared to continue on his way. As he was coming out, he saw a vigorous-looking enough nag tied to a tree-trunk.

“ Eh! ” said he to himself, “ This beast will help me to cover a few leagues at any rate.”

He mounted it and left, already thinking, with a spirit steadfast above all praise, that things were not yet as bad as they might have been.



VIII

Jean Makes Some Fine Acquaintances, Takes Charge of a Ticklish Errand, and Continues His Travels.

 JEAN galloped for some time before finding a way out of the forest. It was not until daylight that he passed the last clustering thickets and found himself in open country. It is true that he had slept under a rock for several hours, and this time, so well employed, added to the repast he had made at the expense of the mysterious charcoal-burner, restored him so well that he had completely regained his strength.

He had not gone a league through the open country before he perceived a little hamlet, at the entrance of which stood a wicked little tavern, with an enormous sign bearing these mendacious words, whose usage is nevertheless as ancient as the kingdom itself: "Good Lodging for Foot and Horse."

Although Jean felt a great desire to wet his tongue somewhere, he was not sure whether to risk himself in an inhabited place. He thought of nothing but enraged Huguenots thirsting for his blood, and readily believed

all France to be full of enemies. However, as he could scarcely spend his entire life hidden in the woods, he resolved to come as close to the village as possible and reconnoiter.

He spurred his beast, and started off on his expedition. The path he followed brought him directly to the highway, and as the end of his way was hidden by bushes, he suddenly came face to face with two soldiers who were walking briskly away from the village.

They were heavily-built louts, with iron casques, rusty corselets, broken shoes, immense rapiers, and enormous halberds. These two honest fellows went off into gales of laughter at sight of the traveler.

"Faith, sir," said one, "one would take you for a lobster without his shell!"

"I don't deny it," answered our Gascon hero, "but one cannot always have one's cuirass on one's back."

"One can, at least," the other rascal assured him impudently, attempting to approach, "one can at least pull one's purse from one's pocket and offer it to friends."

"It can be done, no doubt," answered Jean, in as flippant a tone, "but that is not my custom. I am content to offer those friends good pistols well loaded and a fairly solid blade."

The two old campaigners began to laugh.

"I believe, sir," said the one who had spoken first, "that you are smart, and a good soldier — a Catholic, I'd swear to it, by your looks, especially since you have neither a white scarf nor a white cassock. Well sir, we

are Catholics also, and at your service. My companion's name is Broum, and mine is Barbillon."

"My dear servants, pass over to my right, and ten paces away from my horse, so that we may talk without embarrassment. Besides, to make sure that we understand each other, and that our relations may be pleasant, I am going to take you into my confidence."

With these words, he pulled on his horse's bridle, pulling up his stirrups and putting his hands in his pockets. He turned them out and proved triumphantly that he had not the least bit of money left at all. Everything he possessed when he was captured had passed into the hands of Captain Bourbet's reiters with a rapidity that reflected credit on their dexterity. The prisoner had scarcely had time to notice that his pockets were being visited.

This frank exposition made a lively impression on the soldiers. First, they stopped calling him "sir," and they slung their halberds on their backs with the most evident intention of not using them. Even in those barbarous times, one did not always find people ready to kill others simply for the pleasure of it.

Jean, seeing such completely peaceful dispositions, hastened to renew the conversation.

"Are you really good Catholics, my comrades? I am glad of that. For, aside from the fact that my faith is firm, I have serious reasons for detesting the Huguenots and all that concerns them."

"Except their horses," said Barbillon in a matter-of-

fact way, "for surely, brother, you are not accustomed to mount such a nag as that to follow your company, and you must certainly have recruited your mount on the road, and without paying for it very dearly."

"Let us not meddle in other people's business," said Jean. "This nag is mine, and the proof of that is that I will sell it to anyone who wants it."

"Our captain might buy it from you, to carry his luggage," said Barbillon.

"And who is your captain?"

"The Seigneur de Brantôme, a pretty courtier, well curled and well pomaded, always dressed up like a reliquary. But he fights like a devil, and has a man hanged for less than nothing."

At the name of Brantôme, our friend Jean had thrilled with joy. He clearly remembered hearing his father tell long tales about this gentleman. He was even distantly related to him, and besides the frank, good-humored, and intelligent character of M. d'Alençon's chamberlain was too well known throughout the province for Jean to doubt for a moment that he would be favorably received as soon as he sent in his name. With great joy Jean foresaw the end of his terrible isolation. He would also find out where he was.

"Soldiers, my friends," he cried, "your news fills me with joy. It is useless to tell you how or why. Only do me the pleasure of showing me exactly where I may be able to find your captain."

"You will be able to offer him your head in five minutes," answered Barbillon.

"Thank you, thank you. He is in this village then?"

"With the whole troop, and two hundred more men-at-arms will arrive during the day. We are going to the camp before Orleans."

"By'r Lady, I'll be in good company," said Jean to himself.

Without any further thought for his two interlocutors, he gave two vigorous kicks to his rustic courser, and soon came into the village. A group of soldiers were playing bowls in the square, and a sentinel who was walking back and forth gave him sufficient indication of where he might find the commandant.

He alighted therefore in front of the inn door, and called to one of the old soldiers with an air of authority that went quite badly with his sad equipage.

"Eh! Friend," said he, "Go and tell the Seigneur de Brantôme that M. Jean de la Tour-Miracle is below and wishes to speak to him. Go and return quickly."

The knave was somewhat astonished by the new-comer's arrogance. But in times of civil war, there are a thousand reasons why people should not be judged by their appearance. The greatest lord may be discovered under a simple peasant's vest. And so Jean's message was sent in without delay, and two minutes later, a valet came down and stood in front of the inn door.

"Is it you, my gentleman," he said to Jean, "who are M. de la Tour-Miracle?"

"Don't doubt it, my lad, and I wish to speak to the Seigneur de Brantôme."

"He is having his beard curled at this moment, but

you may come in, for he is telling his barber how he loves you. Only, he is sure you have a grey beard, and I see you here with a blond moustache."

"He confuses me with my father. To whom can I give my horse, to keep it from being stolen?"

"I'll keep my eye on him," said the valet. "But give the bridle to Barbillion, who is right behind you."

"Ah! It is my friend Barbillion? Well, hold my horse. I have confidence in our old acquaintance."

Jean entered the house and went up the stairs, but not without casting a painful glance over the irreparable disorder of his toilet. The Naiades of the river in which he had spent a whole day had covered the cloth of his doublet and the leather of his boots with an even coating of slime, and as sole compensation for the embroideries whose brilliancy they had forever tarnished, they had deposited fragments of aquatic grasses on him here and there. As an additional luxury, the forest moss on which Jean had slept had been generous to him also, in lending him numerous bits of grass and dead leaves. He was a veritable man of the woods.

In view of the impossibility of disguising the serious defects of his toilet, Jean contented himself with curling his moustache. The valet who led the way opened the door of the great room of the inn, on the first floor, and the adventurous knight found himself face to face with Captain Brantôme.

This gentleman, who has since won such a great reputation with his writings, had not yet thought of taking

up the pen. He was young, and occupied much more with his pleasures, and particularly with court favors and his military reputation, than with the worship of the muses. His appearance was pleasing at first sight. Brantôme was not very tall, but he was well built. His face seemed animated, his eyes full of fire and ardor. He had the hooked nose that goes with courageous natures; black moustaches, curled and turned up at the ends, and bushy brown hair, which the barber, or hairdresser as you will, was at this moment occupied in putting into the most beautiful order possible.

Brantôme's toilet was almost completed. He had on a doublet the color of dead leaves, embroidered with silver; breeches of the same color, with flame-colored ribands, red stockings, and a Spanish ruff. It was a gallant costume. But as Brantôme was no less a good soldier than he was a fine dandy, all his warlike harness was furbished and resplendent, ranged about on several chairs with his leather equipment.

When Jean entered, Brantôme, rising, made several steps to meet him.

"God's death! What is this?" he cried, astonished. "The Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle was announced, and in fact I see him before me, but considerably rejuvenated!"

"I am the son of Messire Aurèle-Agrippa," said Jean deferentially, "and I come to ask for your protection, sir."

"I am at your service," Brantôme answered, embracing

the young man, "provided you ask me nothing contrary to the service of my masters, those divinities whom I adore! What is it? In the first place, it seems to me, to have some clothes, and probably some breakfast? Christophe! Give this gentleman what he needs for a change; as for the meal, I know it is ready, and we shall do it honor. I will not listen to you before you are better dressed, my friend, so it is useless to thank me so much."

Jean hastened to satisfy his generous host, and when he had again taken on the appearance of a civilized being, he hastened to return to Brantôme, who was already at table, and who invited him to follow his example, and talk meanwhile.

Jean obeyed, and recited his adventures. Like a discreet and wily lover, he mentioned neither Magdelaine nor Corisande, but he spared no details of the high deeds of the battle commanded by Montluc, of his boredom during his captivity, and of his cleverness in escaping. As Brantôme was as much a Gascon as Jean, this conversation in the heroic manner found an attentive and benevolent listener.

When Jean had finished his Odyssey, Brantôme said:

"And what can I do for you now?"

"Very much, sir, and I shall be eternally grateful to you. First of all, where am I?"

"Not very far from Angoulême."

"Oh! Oh! But I should like to return home."

"That's something very difficult to do. The whole

country has risen behind us, and you would run a great risk of being recaptured! If the Huguenots take you again, they will not fail to kill you to avenge the death of Gaspard Lescout. When he was alive, he was a renowned speaker among the heretics of the Midi. To return home, therefore, is an enterprise for a knight of the Round Table, no more no less."

Jean scratched his head and thought for a moment.

"At that," he said, "I might very well take advantage of the circumstances which took me out of my canton to make a journey which sooner or later I shall be unable to escape."

"And what journey is that?" Brantôme asked.

"My father wanted to send me to my godmother, Madame Diane, and I had a letter addressed to her in my pocket, but it turned to mush at the bottom of the pond."

"God's body, my dear child," said Brantôme, clapping his hands to indicate his relief. "Don't fail to go to Madame Diane. That's better than running quite fruitless risks, by returning like a sheep to the fold. Madame Diane still has more power than is generally believed, and I compliment you on having such a protector as she. And then, you can do me a service at the same time. I hope you will not refuse."

"How could I dare refuse, filled as I am with gratitude for your good hospitality?" Jean answered.

"Well, my friend, this is my situation. I have been sent into this country by Monseigneur le duc de Guise,

who has been appointed lieutenant-general of the Kingdom, as you doubtless know already. This lord honors me with his friendship, which I have earned by my absolute devotion. I am commissioned to raise ten companies of infantry, and to bring with me to the siege of Orleans all the Catholic nobility which I can persuade to leave the province. You see I do not lack for occupation, and that it is impossible for me, without committing a felony, without in fact ruining myself forever, to leave my employment to run about on other business. But it happens that at the same time, Madame Diane has been pressing me for a necklace which she commissioned me a year ago to order from an Italian goldsmith whom I kept in my suite. For I understand elegant things better than any other man at court, and the greatest ladies always consult my taste. I have the necklace here, and I would have the more pleasure in carrying it to Madame Diane myself in that, in these times, there is merit in knowing how to keep such a piece of jewelry, and in being able to defend it on such a long journey. But you see, I cannot leave my present occupation. I think that you are stout-hearted enough, and clever enough, to act as my messenger. You will go about your business, and mine also. And I do not believe that the effect of receiving my necklace will diminish the results of your letter in the mind of the most beautiful lady in the world."

"Faith, sir," said Jean, "I will not pretend that your proposition does not tempt me. At the same time, I will say again that I should not be displeased to return home,

where I have certain affairs which cannot be ordered in my absence. The more I think of it, the more I would like to be at La Tour-Miracle."

"Love affairs, no doubt," said Brantôme, snapping his fingers. "But one picks up love affairs everywhere. I offer you a splendid occasion for making yourself talked-about."

"I don't deny it, but my father must believe me dead."

"He will have the more pleasure in seeing you again safe and sound, and matured by travel. Come, do you accept? "

Jean quickly understood that he did not have much choice, and that the liberty he seemed to be enjoying was far from complete. Brantôme seemed to wish him well. But if the protector insisted on remaining useless to the protector, the wind might change, good-will might be impaired by ill-humor, and it was difficult to foresee what might happen then. The captain's indifference alone might suffice to harm poor Jean, isolated as he was, moneyless, without resource, and far from his own province.

And then, the young man's imagination took a certain pleasure in the idea of doing his godmother a service, and of presenting himself to her after having risked his life to serve her for a matter of frivolity. The thought of Magdelaine murmured against this frivolousness, but reason here came to the aid of the spirit, and stilled the heart.

"Poor Magdelaine," thought Jean, "when shall I see her again?"

"Faith," something inside him answered, "I am not blamable, after all, since I cannot do otherwise; and besides, who knows, I may see Corisande again."

To Jean's eternal praise be it recorded that this thought occurred to him altogether against his will, and did no more than pass through his mind like a streak of lightning.

"Well sir," he said at last, "I shall be your messenger, and I shall go to visit my lady godmother."

"There's a brave young man," cried Brantôme, rising from the table. "I shall give you the jewel-case."

He opened a little traveling-case which contained many things, and among them packages of little letters tied with favors of rose, green, blue, and every shade in the world. He took up a little coffer covered with black shagreen, and having opened it, displayed to Jean's dazzled eyes a marvelous necklace of emeralds set in an exquisitely worked gold mounting. It was a row of Cupids, delicately chased, their feet resting on a garland of little roses, and each holding up one of the sides of each stone with one hand.

"That is a marvelous thing," said Jean. "I am afraid I shall be robbed."

"That is just what must be avoided, and if you save this package, you will have made a great success of your undertaking."

"I shall hide it in the top of my left boot," said Jean.
"What do you think of the idea?"

"It is not a bad idea. You will take one of my men with you. I have some very stout fellows who will serve the purpose."

"I choose Barbillon in advance," Jean answered, "provided that he does not know what I am carrying. I believe he will be a good companion in such an undertaking as mine."

"You have a good eye, my friend Jean. Take Barbillon. And when will you leave?"

"Immediately, if it pleases you."

"That is proper talk. I am like you. I detest slowpokes. You are a worthy son of Messire Aurèle-Agrippa."



IX

Jean Discovers Several Defects in His Servant. He has a Meeting that Fills Him with Joy, and Another that Promises to be of an Altogether Different Kind.

JEAN did not have any long preparations to make. Breakfast was over and the Seigneur de Brantôme, while vivaciously expressing the pleasure he had experienced in making the acquaintance of his guest, did not hide from him how delighted he would be to learn, at the earliest possible date, that the precious necklace whose making he had superintended was safe in Madame Diane's hands. Now the best way to achieve this result was to hasten Jean's departure.

A few minutes more were spent in acquainting the young Gascon with the recent victory at the battle of Dreux.

"And that is something," said Brantôme, in his capable way, as he finished the recital, "that is something that puts the gentlemen of the religion in a bad position. As for me, I am very pleased, and I suppose you feel the same way about it."

"Don't doubt it for a moment," Jean answered. "The Huguenots are the cause of all my troubles. They have made me run about the country for four days in the most disagreeable manner, and have separated me from all that I love. I shall never forgive them in my life. And now, Captain Brantôme, good-bye! You may rest assured the necklace will arrive at its destination."

Jean shook the hand of the courtier, who accompanied him to the door of the inn. The valet had already had two good horses brought around. Barbillon was sent for, and found at table with other rascals of his stamp, with a bottle of wine, and cards. The captain gave him strict orders to obey M. de la Tour-Miracle faithfully, under penalty of the halter, and our two adventurers set forth.

For a long time, Jean could see his elegant friend on the door-sill of the inn, waving to him with his right hand and curling his moustache with his left. Then a turn around a clump of trees suddenly hid him from sight. He was alone with his thoughts.

"I cannot stop considering," he said to himself, "with what strange capricious fortunes my first steps in this life are tangled. In two days I have run more risks than more than one honest gentleman incurs throughout his entire existence, and everything seems to indicate that the end of them is not yet. How will it end? God knows! I hope I shall soon be near my dear Magdelaine again."

Lovers have a secret way of managing to repeat the same things over and over again without becoming bored with them, and while other mortals quickly tire of the

same idea, or at least seek to discover new aspects of the thought that pleases them, the imagination of a lover wanders in great delight back and forth inside a single notion, and after having passed and repassed twenty times before the same picture, still delights in it.

Jean was profoundly convinced that the high position in the world that he was shortly to occupy (since he was to have the honor of being received by Madame Diane), would act peculiarly on Magdelaine's spirit, and oblige her, whatever came, to give her hand to a man of such importance. As for his father's opposition, he thought he could manage that easily enough, for if his godmother sent him to the army with an officer's commission, it was unlikely that Messire Aurèle-Agrippa should disturb himself to come and see what his son was doing. All these plans were neither well conceived nor wisely reasoned-out, but there is only one answer to give any who may show surprise at that, and that is that they have probably never been young nor in love.

Jean rode along thus, plunged in thought, and did not pay too much attention to his worthy servant. This last had remained silent longer, no doubt, than was consonant with his temperament, for all of a sudden he cried out, in a half-submissive, half-insolent tone:

"I hope, my young sir, that you have forgiven me my little jest of this morning! You know! When we met on the road? By Our Lady, I swear I did not know who you were! "

"You see I hold no grudge, you scoundrel, since I chose you from among all your comrades."

"Well, you were right, and you won't repent of it, on the faith of Barnabé Barbillon, native of Nancy."

"Ah! Lorrainer?" said Jean. "Traitor to God, to . . ."

"His neighbor," Barbillon finished, unmoved. "I know the proverb. But you must not be anxious on that account. And so long as you leave me in peace to drink, swear, gamble, prattle with the beauties, and here and there offer my compliments and my services to great merchants who have more money than they can reasonably carry themselves—all very reasonable things—we'll never have any cause to complain of each other."

"Ah! For that, master Barbillon, Lorrainer and scoundrel, I see that we must come to an understanding on these matters before we go any farther. You must have noticed that I had them give you a sword and a dagger, but no pistols. It was so that I should be the stronger. You have too much sense not to have understood that if I took you with me in preference to all your comrades, I was sure, in any case, that I would be associating with a bandit. I chose you simply because I had already sampled you. This is how we shall travel: you shall neither drink, gamble, nor steal, and you shall leave the girls in peace. Further, at the first impertinence, I shall put a ball through your head. If, on the contrary, you act as you should, I promise you that you will be

satisfied with me and with Captain Brantôme. Those are my conditions."

Barbillon was silent a minute. Then, half-turning his horse about, he cried:

"I am going back!"

"Barbillon! Barbillon! My friend, I never miss a shot, and I'll put lead in your loins if you do not come back immediately."

Barbillon immediately understood the force of the argument, and turned about to continue to follow his master. But he was mournful, and did not say a word.

But after a few moments, his natural loquacity overcame his ill-humor.

"Sir, is it permitted to sing?"

"As much as you will, my lad."

Barbillon immediately set to singing a soldier's song in ninety couplets. We should like to quote this product of the military muse of the Sixteenth century. Unfortunately, its tone is too high, and chaste ears would not appreciate its beauties. Jean, whose scruples in this regard were very slight, laughed heartily at the poet's peculiar fancies, and the singer's preposterous intonations.

"Sir," said Barbillon, made serene once more by his success as a singer, "you are horribly hard on the poor world, but I think none the less we shall be able to get along. Where are we going?"

"Where are we going? To the castle of Anet."

"I know that country as I know my boots," the soldier answered, "and I led a good life there when I was

a servant in the army of M. the Connétable. And what are you going to do in Normandy? ”

“ That is none of your business. But since you know the road so well, you shall conduct me, for after all I do not know it at all. But here it is four or five hours that we have been on the march. Let us stop at this cabaret.”

And in effect, there was a sort of a little rustic kennel by the side of the road, before which the two horsemen stopped.

The whole house seemed to be in a great flurry. The host and two husky serving-wenches ran hither and thither in great agitation. The cause of all the noise was easy to understand, as two or three coaches stood before the door, with a number of lackeys standing about them, and a few arquebusiers on horseback, who probably served as escort for some great personage.

The host did not take a very polite tone for two men who were rather modestly dressed, and he began by swearing he did not know where he could receive them, as his house was more than filled by the travellers who had just arrived.

“ We do not ask you for your house,” Jean answered. “ Only give our horses oats, and us a glass of wine and a piece of bread.”

“ Well, then,” said the host, “ go into the field here beside the ditch, and what you ask will be brought to you.”

Jean went and sat on the grass under an elm, followed by Barbillion leading the two horses.

Half an hour passed, and neither oats nor wine arrived.

"Sir," said Barbillion, "this brigand of an inn-keeper will make us wait in this manner until the last judgment. If you wish, I will take our horses among those of these great gentlemen or great ladies who are obliging us to fast, and then bring you wherewith to refresh yourself also."

"I see no harm in that," said Jean, after thinking it over, and Barbillion quickly went off with the two horses.

Fortunately for himself, Jean noticed his servant's eagerness. He rose, followed him, and saw him approaching a horseman, to whom he spoke in a questioning tone.

The horseman laughed, and began examining Jean's horse.

"Well," said our hero, "here is this rascal of a Barbillion who thinks he will sell one of the horses and escape on the other! I am very glad to be able to prove to him that I have my eye on him."

He tiptoed forward until he stood beside the horseman, to whom he spoke, suddenly.

"Well, sir, at what price do they offer you this horse?"

"Very reasonably, for sure, for he seems to be sound and in good shape, and the seller only asks six *écus*. I am going to buy him."

"I beg you to do nothing of the sort, for this horse is mine, and this knave who was selling him to you is a lackey who lacks training, and to whom I am about to administer a correction."

Barbillon was standing straight as a post, sustaining his master's furious look with unequalled effrontery. Jean seized a knotty stick which happened to be within reach, and, to the great edification of the soldiers and servants, began to shower the guilty Barbillon with blows. The servant at first forced himself to put a good face to it, but Jean was determined to hurt him, and soon the knave began to howl and cry out loudly, while his back was being marbled under the cudgel's rhythmic play.

At Barbillon's howling, the only window of the inn's only room was opened, and a lady looked out to see whence this noise might emanate. She had no sooner looked at Jean's empurpled, angry face, than she cried out:

"What! M. de la Tour-Miracle! Here! "

On his side, the young man, tired of beating, mechanically raised his eyes and perceived the young lady.

"Ah! " he exclaimed. "Magdelaine! "

For a moment he thought he saw a vision, but the task in which he had just been so enthusiastically employed was not one of those that makes one see the heavens opened. As he did see them so, he quickly realized that it was a reality. So, leaving the interesting Barbillon, who did not seem disposed to resent this abandonment, and who, besides, was surrounded by laughing men without being able to join in the merriment, Jean went into the house and asked a servant whether Mademoiselle de Castillac was really among the travellers.

"Yes, sir," the man answered, "and I was about to

invite you on her behalf to come up to the room where these ladies are resting a few moments before continuing on their way."

Jean eagerly ran in to kiss Magdelaine's hand. He tried to put into the pressure of his fingers, the warmth of his kiss, in the half-veiled look that accompanied it, all the ardor and passion of his soul. Magdelaine blushed a little, but quickly composed herself, and answered all this love with a smile of friendship and good-will, almost of protection. She kept Jean's hand in her own and turned to an old lady near whom she sat.

"Madam," she said, "permit me to present to you the son of the Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle. He has just performed some fine feats of arms in defence of the Catholic faith, at the side of M. de Montluc. Jean, salute Madame de Largebaston, wife of the first president of that name."

Jean eagerly obeyed, and bowed before the illustrious magistrate's wife with all the respect that was inspired in those days by the virtues of which the parliaments offered such great and numerous examples. Jean knew that the first president of the parliament of Bordeau was in disgrace. But he knew also that this disgrace had been earned gloriously at a time when the misfortunes that are inevitable during a minority had put the royal power in the hands of courtiers and factions.

The wife of the first president was a tall woman, with a severe, imposing face. She had an air of great authority about her person, mingled with a great deal of sweetness.

She received Jean gracefully, and begged him to tell how he came to be so far from his province.

Our hero did not wait to be entreated, and left out of his recital, which was otherwise very truthful, only a few minor circumstances. Everything he suppressed had to do with Madame Corisande, whom he did not mention.

His story finished, he expressed a desire to know how and why Mademoiselle de Castillac was also so far from home.

"You will agree," said he, "that if you have a right to be surprised at meeting me here, I must be even more astonished."

"I grant it," said Magdelaine, "and yet nothing could be simpler. Our good parish priest and our friend the prior of Saint-Gilles thought I should not stay at Castillac any more, for I disliked to do so for many reasons which it would be useless to tell you. They have confided me to the care of Madame the president's lady. We are going to Paris; she, to solicit the King's justice in favor of her husband; I to implore the Monarch's grace in a cause that is not so fine, and which I will no doubt soon have to defend. In a word, the life of M. de Castillac is threatened. My duty is to save him if I can, and I shall do my duty. Madame has many friends."

"And I will help you as much as possible," Madame de Largebaston added.

"Mademoiselle, you are an angel," cried Jean, in great emotion. "As soon as I have seen Madame Diane, my godmother, I shall hasten to Paris."

Madame the president's wife quickly understood that Jean was in love. She congratulated him on having settled his affections so worthily, smiled when Magdelaine swore the marriage was impossible, and smiled even more when Jean declared in a tone of conviction that, on the contrary, nothing could be more certain, and that he considered himself the wisest man in the world, in pursuing so right and necessary a design.

"This claim to wisdom seems very sound to me," said the president's wife. "But in any case, you may be sure that I understand your attachment to Mademoiselle, and that I cannot disapprove of it, although I understand also your father's refusal, and the generous resistance of the object of your passion."

"Well," said Magdelaine, trying to jest, "it is certain that some day or another, M. Jean de la Tour-Miracle will obtain a court order which will force me to wed him. Until then, I shall have respite."

Our hero took the jest very well. They talked for some time in friendly fashion, but at last Jean realized that in spite of his regret, he must be on his way, for he had no escort besides Barbillon, in whom he would have done wrong to repose too much confidence, so that it behooved him to reach some place to sleep in before night. Magdelaine herself pressed him to leave, and gave him permission to come and see her if she were in Paris when he came there, which would be at an uncertain time, despite all the lovelorn young heart's desire to see his mistress again as soon as possible.

He prolonged his leave-taking as much as possible, and then went off to rejoin his horses and his servant. But as he set his foot on the top step of the stairway, he heard a frightful clamor coming from the road; cries, oaths, clanking of swords, were quickly followed by shots.

"Oh! Oh!" thought Jean, "It seems I cannot go twenty-four hours without drawing sword. This time at least, I bless my fate, for it is for my lady's safety that I must take sword in hand."

With this chivalrous thought, he was about to hasten to the scene of the tumult, when he heard rapid footsteps on the stairs. It was the equerry of the first president's wife.

"Ah, sir, I beg you go out by the little door at the back and save yourself," the brave man cried. "It is your life these wretches want!"

"What wretches?" asked Jean.

"Eh," the equerry answered, "the bandits who are attacking us. They swear you killed one of them, and stole and sold his horse. They have tracked you here, and they are crying: 'Revenge for the charcoal-burner!'"

"Ah! It is for the charcoal-burner?"

"I beg you, sir," the equerry repeated, "do not provoke the massacre of these ladies!"

"Idiot, you can see I must not run away, for if I do, these ladies will be in real danger. Stay here. I am going to see these brigands, and since it is only me they want, the business can be managed right enough."

Jean had completely forgotten Madame Diane and her necklace. Magdelaine's safety was his only thought. He heard his beloved's dear voice crying to him from the head of the stairs.

"For God, Jean, do not go out to be killed."

He descended with no less rapidity, however, and in the hall downstairs found Barbillion, sword in hand, holding off two or three rascals with gallows faces, and shouting for all he was worth.

"I will defend my good master to the death."

Jean came and stood beside him, and between them, performing marvellous feats with their blades, they pushed their adversaries to the door of the house, flooring two or three on the way.

Then, with one vigorous effort, they forced their way out of the door.

"Bravo, Barbillion!" said Jean.

"I don't work badly, when I set about it," the soldier answered, dealing one more good body thrust to a laggard.



X

Captain Pierrot Makes a Long Confession to His Master; after which He Gives Him Very Good Counsel.

THE bandits, in falling back, had formed a circle at a little distance from the door, and the horsemen of the president's wife had doubtless had time to rally, for the sound of a sustained musketry-fire, which seemed to be occupying the attention of the greater part of the bandits, was heard from the left side of the house.

But the crowd surged back to let through a great grimy-faced rascal, armed to the teeth.

"What cowards you must be, not to be able to take two men, between the lot of you! Watch, and hereafter show more adroitness!"

Speaking thus, the brigand advanced toward the door of the inn. He held a sort of broad-axe in his hand, and twirled it rapidly about his head, to throw it at Jean. But as he measured his distance, his eyes had no sooner fallen on his enemy's face than he threw the axe to the ground, and letting out a cry of joy, ran up to our hero, his empty hands extended.

"Ah! My dear master!" he cried. "Do you not recognize your good Pierrot?"

"What! Is this your trade?" Jean answered, somewhat astonished.

"And for a long time," the old servant answered. "But before I tell you my exploits, it would be expedient, I suppose, to stop the battle. We shall come to a friendly agreement."

Jean eagerly applauded this excellent idea, and Pierrot, assisted by the witnesses of this touching scene, soon had withdrawn his men to the other side of the road, and some two hundred paces from the tavern. It was a magnificent collection of scoundrels. They must have numbered sixty, and left nothing to be desired in the way of beardedness, raggedness, and uncourtly manners.

The president's wife's horsemen, on the other hand, stood guard about the house, and so the situation became what was to be dubbed, four centuries later, "an armed truce."

Pierrot having disposed his men as he thought best, put his sword, knife, pistols, and arquebuse on the grass, and came back, his hands stuck in his belt, and his composure complete, to where Jean stood. The latter, struck by this intrepidity, could not help but say to him:

"Ah! Are you not afraid that I shall take you by the collar and capture you? From the company in which I find you, you seem to me to be in every way ripe for the wheel."

"And if you consider, my dear master," Pierrot an-

swered, stroking his chin, "that I am captain of all these honest people, your opinion as to the employment of which I am worthy will only be confirmed. But I know your honor and your friendship for me too well. I fear nothing. Let me come into this tavern, where you have some friend with you no doubt, and I shall have the honor of seeing you again as before, and, what will doubtless not displease you, I shall tell you how I happen to be here."

"My dear Pierrot," said Jean, "you are in no condition to be produced in the company of ladies, otherwise I should have taken you to greet Mademoiselle Magdelaine, whom I have just met here by chance."

"Ah, my good master," said Pierrot, "you are too hard on me. Allow me to salute a lady whom I respect as much as anyone in the world! Besides, you forget we have our little conference to hold on the matter of a certain charcoal-burner. We must at least come to an understanding on that point, for you have guessed, I hope, that I am determined to be very accommodating."

Jean could not get over his surprise at finding his former servant, Pierrot, elevated to dignity in an interloping world. Thinking that the ladies would be as curious as he to hear the story of the bandit chief, he told Pierrot to wait a few minutes, and went up to the room above where he found the president's wife and Magdelaine already recovered from their fright, and listening to the equerry's recital of how the battle had ended so suddenly.

"Ladies," cried Jean, "this seems to me to be a truly extraordinary adventure, and if you have as much curiosity as I, you will not hesitate to allow Pierrot to present himself to you. I know that it is scarcely suitable for a man of his sort to affront the view of the wife of a first president. But consider, madam, that your husband is in disgrace today, and consequently is no longer compelled to execute justice. I believe I can see that you will deign to condescend to humor our weakness, and listen to what Mademoiselle Magdelaine will be no more displeased to hear than I."

The first president's wife smiled, and confessed that despite her rank and her age, she was not so completely exempt from human weaknesses, as not to feel some desire to hear Pierrot's story. The equerry therefore brought in the brigand, who, as he came into the room, took off his bonnet, went down on his knees, and humbly begged the ladies' forgiveness for the fright he must have given them.

"I am very unlucky today," he cried, "I pursued a man whom I thought to be an ordinary murderer, and set my band at the heels of the best master that ever was, and of two such respectable persons. I confess I do not so greatly regret having troubled Madame the first president's wife, for I have not the honor of being acquainted with her, but I'll give myself a good leathering for having caused a moment of anxiety to Mademoiselle Magdelaine."

"This lad does not lack frankness, as you ladies can

see," said Jean, "and if he shows as much in the recital of his adventures as in his excuses, truth will not have much complaint to make. Come, stand up, Pierrot, and, with these ladies' permission, begin your story."

"Ladies, and sir," said the bandit, "you know, or you may know, that I was born on the estate of Monseigneur Aurèle-Agrippa de la Tour-Miracle, and that my father was one of his tenants."

"It seems," said Jean, interrupting him, "that your story starts a long time back. Abbreviate it as much as you can."

"With all respect, sir, if I abbreviate too much, you will understand nothing, and it is not worth while to begin."

"His argument sounds plausible," said Magdelaine, "let him tell it in his own way."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle, I will take as little advantage of your complaisance as possible. Monseigneur Aurèle-Agrippa, as you may know, is somewhat crabbed, but he is also very kind to his vassals, so that the people of his estate are very much attached to him. As for me, he took me into his house to serve him, and I pride myself that I have never left M. Jean since he was born, for I am only three years older than he, and we always played together."

"Your story does not progress very rapidly," Jean growled, "And I am losing much time."

"You will catch it up, sir. One day several young men from the other villages formed a company to war

on the Huguenots. It was in the time of the first civil war. The lads from about our place were enrolled, and I put myself down with the rest. But as the governor of the next town had recently hung some of our associates as pillagers, we were very careful not to go about in full daylight as before, but on the contrary, we kept our association very secret. The Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle never knew that it existed on his estate. Soon I became the leader of my comrades.

"A few months ago, a lord whom Mademoiselle Magdelaine knows well had occasion to learn of our doings, and he wanted to profit by it for the furtherance of his own plans. Oh, do not turn pale, my good damozel, I shall say nothing to torment you."

"I do not know what you are thinking of, Pierrot," said Magdelaine in a somewhat agitated voice, "but I do not know anyone who had any dealings with your brigands."

"It is quite possible that I am mistaken, at that," answered Pierrot, giving her a significant look. "But let me go on. This lord came to me, and advised me to use my men to fight impartially against the Catholics and against the Huguenots. 'In that way,' this excellent friend told me, 'you will be sure to earn twice as much, by pillaging the one as well as the other side, as occasion offers, and besides, you will from time to time be able to hire yourselves to one party or the other, who will pay you fat fees to rid them of this or that adversary. For example, this very day, if you want to go and burn

the castle of the Catholic Seigneur de Poyac, here are fifty gold *ecus*, which the Huguenots offer you, and which will scarcely cost you more trouble than the taking of them.'

"What would you? The sum was tempting. Besides, I had a grievance against the Catholics for having executed some of us. I led my knaves in an attack on Poyac. We pillaged everything, and then burned the manor. It happened that the loot was greater than we had hoped for. From that moment, it was decided that we would attack anyone, without prejudice."

"I did not think you were so great a rascal," said Jean. "And, not to boast of a penetration I did not possess, I even believed you honest."

"Ah! Sir," said Pierrot, "cleverer men than you would have made that mistake. Besides, I have always loved you, as I am proving today, and expect to prove again in the future."

"After the sack of the castle of Poyac, the same lord of whom I spoke before proposed to us that we should join the rebellious Huguenots. As that was not a matter of pillaging, but one of receiving sturdy blows, we refused. However, after repeated supplication, I consented to let some twenty of my men enroll a few days under the orders of the lord I have mentioned. Then the traitor, wanting to have them under his own command, denounced all those who had refused to serve under him, and myself, to M. de Montluc. Fortunately, I was at that time accompanying my young master. I found myself

quite close to Montluc, who, having other business, and not knowing me besides, did not have me seized on the spot. We fought against the Huguenots, as you must remember, sir. You were captured, and luck willed that I should fall into the hands of my twenty men. They informed me of the treachery of which I had been in danger of falling victim, which its author had disclosed to them to attach them to himself more closely by showing them the unhappy lot of their companions.

"As I knew myself that none of these wicked plans had been put into execution, I took my twenty men with me, abandoned Captain Bourbet and his reiters, and quickly ran to rally my other comrades. No doubt, sir, you would have preferred that I should deliver you on the spot. But reflect that if we had not been the stronger, my friends would have been the victims of the snares that were laid for them. If I was your servant, I was also their captain, and I sacrificed myself.

"So I let you be taken away, and assembling all my band, I made them understand without difficulty that henceforth Catholics and Protestants alike would pursue us to the death, and that it was prudent to seek other scenes for our exploits. We left without delay, and traveled in the direction of a certain forest which M. Jean knows well."

"The devil, if you speak truth!" the gentleman answered. "For three days, I knew neither where I am, nor where I am going."

"So much the better, then," said Pierrot. "As I might

have need to seek refuge there again, it is not necessary to name it. We traveled in the direction of the forest which you do not know then, and we had our reasons for so doing. Listen to this, sir, I beg you. It concerns you deeply."

"I believe you must be going to speak of the charcoal-burner."

"Exactly. This brave man is a gentleman from Angoumois, whose name I have promised not to mention."

"What secrecy!" cried Jean.

"We cannot make confidences otherwise, sir, in our position. This gentleman, then, was well known to some old blades among us. They had advised me to go to see him, and to ask him to join our band. 'You are brave, Pierrot,' they told me, 'but you have not as much experience as this captain. He has served almost everywhere, and is on the outs with everyone. Besides, he is a Huguenot at this moment, and is hiding on account of a bad business in which he was mixed up.' We went to seek him. I had gone ahead of my band with two of my old foxes. They presented me to this venerable personage, who agreed to give us good counsel, but declared he could not join us at the moment, as he was engaged in a very important enterprise, which looked to the salvation of all the Huguenots in France. He consented to come and see our troops, and promised to come on the morrow.

"The next day, which was this morning, he did not come, and growing impatient, we went to his hut. We

found our man as you left him, and in spite of all the cares of those of our braves whom we left to see to him, I believe that he must be dead by now."

"So much the worse for the Huguenots," said Jean. "It seems to me that they had a fine associate in that fellow."

"My whole troop cried out for vengeance," Pierrot went on. "Soon our scouts had discovered that our man had been brought to Captain Brantôme by a very ill-accounted soldier, and had then gone out of the village with a mounted escort. We set out on your tracks, and that is my story."

"Pierrot," said Magdelaine, "I hope that you will quit this wicked trade as soon as possible."

"I do not ask better, mademoiselle, and if I find some lord who will take me into his hire, for whatsoever party, with my band, I am absolutely ready to turn into a soldier. Meanwhile, I must live."

At this point of the conversation, the first president's wife's intendant came to tell his mistress that the mules were harnessed to the coaches, and that the escort was ready to mount whenever she desired.

"Come," said Madame de Largebaston, "we must go, my dear Magdelaine. Do you think, M. Pierrot, that your men will be quiet until we have gone?"

"They will be as gentle as lambs, madam," said Pierrot. "I have given them strict orders."

The two ladies rose, and took affectionate leave of Jean.

"When we meet again," said Madame de Largebaston, "I hope your love-affair will be further along."

"Madam, and you, mademoiselle," said Jean, putting his hand on his breast, "my heart will never change."

He gave his hand to the two ladies and conducted them to their coach. They climbed in and made themselves as comfortable as they could. Then the president's wife's women installed themselves in the other carriages, with the intendant and a few other of the higher servants. The equerries mounted their horses, and last good-byes were said.

For a long time, Jean followed with his eyes this caravan that was carrying away the best part of his soul.

"When shall I see Magdelaine again?" he said to himself. "Shall I ever see her again? Shall I even reach the castle of Anet, from which I am still so far? Surrounded as I am by dangers and obstacles, if I cannot deliver Captain Brantôme's necklace into the hands of Madame Diane, I shall perish, at least, thinking of you, Magdelaine."

Such were the thoughts that agitated the amorous cavalier's heart as long as he could see a plume wave in the distance, or the brilliance of sun on point of lance. When all had disappeared, and he had nothing before him but the brigands lying on the grass, and beside him Pierrot and the frightened innkeeper's family, he sighed, and said to himself: "Come, enough of love. Let us think now how to get out of this mess! My situation is not so

simple yet, and my whole mind is not too much to light my way out."

Pierrot saw the reaction that came over his old master's spirit.

"Sir," said he, "it is perhaps somewhat late to continue on your way. But in the first place, where are you going?"

Jean had no reason to doubt of Pierrot's attachment, and besides, he was in the power of the brigands. He told him the goal of his journey, but concealed the matter of the jewel-case. In the same way, quite innocently, he had not said a word to Magdelaine of Corisande. For Jean, before all else, was a thoughtful, cautious man.

Pierrot, on learning that Jean was going so far, thought a few minutes, and then let fall these words of wisdom:

"Sir, before you arrive at Anet, you will certainly have met two or three Royal armies, as many Huguenot armies, thirty Catholic detachments, as many Protestant detachments, and more than two hundred parties of cavalry and infantry, not counting honest people like myself. In short, you will never arrive. Furthermore, you are my prisoner here."

"You make me tremble for Magdelaine," cried Jean.

"Oh! Those ladies have an escort that will guard them from small robbers, and safe-conducts which will protect them from the big ones. But you are alone, and once again I tell you, you are my prisoner."

"What must I do then, according to your notion?"

"I see only one recourse," answered Pierrot, "and that is to become our chief."

"Are you speaking seriously?"

"Nothing could be more serious, and that is what I would do."



XI

Barbillon Continues to have Defects, the which Oblige His Master to Take Refuge in Arms that had Ever Been Open to Him.

IWOULD in fact be curious to know how your rascals would receive the proposition of serving me as guards to the end of my journey," Jean answered. "If I had money, I know it would be an easy matter, but do not forget, my good Pierrot, that Captain Brantôme was not in funds and that he gave me only enough money to make the journey. So that I have nothing to give your worthy friends."

"It is not a question of your money," said Pierrot. "I will present you as a gentleman who is a consummate master of the arts of war, and particularly of the important branch that relates to ambushing. What were we going to ask from our Angoumois? Exactly what we find in you, an experienced leader."

"But, wretch, would you make me a robber chief?"

"Would you rather not make your journey? Come, it is decided, let us not discuss it further. Besides, it will only be a pretense. The important thing is to know how we shall get through the country. You must realize, after

what I told you, that we are in a position to play Protestant and Huguenot, turn and turn about. Well, we will travel with you toward Normandy, and when we see red pennants in the distance, we will cry: 'Long live the Pope!' and from our right hand pockets we will pull out scarves of the suitable color."

As he spoke, Pierrot fumbled in his breeches on the side mentioned and brought out a large red scarf which he draped across his chest.

"But do we meet white standards, on the contrary? Then, my dear master, we simply reach into our left-hand pockets, and we become as good heretics as Calvin himself."

"That is not bad at all," said Jean, "and I abandon myself willingly to you. But I must confess the idea of travelling along with so many honest people rather repels me."

"Think hard, sir," said Pierrot, "and you will change your mind. In any case, you realize you will not leave us, as we must have either a leader or a prisoner."

Jean thought a while, and decided it was almost stupid to yield to misplaced scruples. It was no doubt disagreeable for virtue to disguise itself as downright vice. But was it not better to submit to this necessary masquerade than for virtue to be victimized once more?

"In the end," thought Jean, "Madame Diane will have her necklace, I shall save my neck, and my brigand friends will wait a little longer for their hempen cravates."

"I accept, Pierrot," he cried. "Go and arrange the business!"

Pierrot left the inn and went over to his people. He spoke to them with great vivacity, and a triumphant air. In fine, he no doubt told them many well-thought-out things, for the end of his speech was drowned in applause. He seemed to conclude with recommendations, and then went back to the inn.

"Come, sir," he said to Jean, "to horse, your escort is ready. Where is your servant?"

"I hope he has not fled with the horses, during this fighting," cried Jean. "Barbillon! Barbillon!"

Barbillon was sought for, and found at last, at grips with two robbers, to whose detriment he had employed his supernatural talent at the game of tarots. His face was already bloody, and he was writhing under their blows.

He was withdrawn from his painful position, and when he was on his feet, his master gave him a vigorous blow with his riding-whip, to comfort him, and ordered him to bring the horses.

Barbillon did not wait to be ordered twice. At Pierrot's order, all the brigands put on their red scarves. Jean sent three or four to act as advance-guard, with orders to fall back on the main body at the slightest sign of danger, and they set out.

It would take too long to describe the unimportant things that happened to our band of worthies. Two or three times they met armed bands which, taking them for partisans of their own cause, did not seek any quarrel

with them. A few times, they met ordinary bands of robbers who judged them too strong to attack, and in short they reached a village near a little town called Beaumont, a few leagues from Mamers, without much trouble.

They lodged in this place in military fashion, posing as Huguenots, for the countryside was occupied by troops of that religion, and announced that they were a party of new recruits, on their way to join the main body of the army. This was done according to orders from Captain Jean de la Tour-Miracle. These precautions were really superfluous, for at that time, everything was done in such disorderly fashion in the royal councils, in the administration, and particularly in the war itself, that as soon as scarves of one's own color were perceived, and no attack made, everyone was satisfied without further inquiry, and treated each other as friends. Pierrot's warriors stole here and there, for sure, or rather let us say they scarcely entered a hamlet, a village, or a burg without playing some trick of their trade. This habit, so annoying to peaceful folk, was not enough to identify them for what they were, since the customs and privileges of soldiers were sufficient explanation for such conduct. Everything, then, went on as well as possible.

They quartered themselves in the village with the intention of leaving again in the morning, and Jean, faithful to his rôle of captain of the band, lodged in the finest house, and went to bed very well satisfied with the way

things had gone during the day. He was scarcely in bed, and beginning to enjoy his first sleep, when he heard someone come into the room. It was Pierrot.

"Sir," said the honest rascal, "sleep is out of the question. You and I are in great danger!"

Jean promptly jumped out of bed.

"What? Are we being attacked by a larger band of robbers than our own?"

"It is not that, but a much more serious business. Dress quickly and follow me."

Jean did as he was told, and Pierrot took him around by the back of the house, led him silently to the board wall of a sort of barn, and showed him a narrow opening, telling him to put his head through to hear what was being said, and see what was going on, inside.

There on the hay sat Barbillion, surrounded by a dozen robbers. He evidently held the floor, and was talking eagerly. When Jean became an invisible member of his audience, Barbillion was just finishing a speech which must have been interrupted by numerous digressions.

"It was freely said in the company," he was saying, "that M. de Brantôme was only waiting for a suitable occasion to send this precious jewel to its destination. He showed it to every one, and as he is a very gossipy gentleman, he had no scruples about telling everyone that he had a very fine necklace, that he always carried it with him, and that he intended to send it to a lady."

“You keep singing the same song over and over. Conclude!”

“Well, I conclude by telling you that it is my master who furnished the occasion. He never told me where he had hidden the treasure, for he is as sly as a gudgeon, that fellow. But I am certain that he has it with him, and it would be a fine piece of business for us if we could take it from him.”

“Do you know, comrades, it is a damned rascally trick that Captain Pierrot played on us, for he doubtless knew the story of the necklace, to put us under the orders of such a fop, who scarcely lets us pillage at all, and who certainly does not keep his promises to us. For to what fine affair has he led us?”

This speech made Jean smile, and he raised his head to look at Pierrot. Pierrot indicated by signs that this was not the time to give over to the pleasures of banter, and Jean did not insist, but put his ear back to the listening-hole.

“My advice then,” Barbillion was saying, “is that we should not fail to wring Pierrot’s neck. Besides, I don’t like his face. As for my master, that is a different matter. I love him, for he has always been kind to me. You see, he is not one of those weighty lads, who either don’t dare talk to their people, or else preach to them two hours together. Ah well, yes, with him a blow with a whip, or a punch is given quicker than it takes to say ‘Amen!’ Outside of that, he is always in good humor, and there is nothing stiff about him! I love this character, and I don’t

want any harm done him. I don't trust you, my little Saint Nick's cherubim! Now here is how I think we should arrange the matter."

"Come, speak quickly. That is what you should have mentioned first."

"Everything comes to him who waits. My master is sleeping at this moment, the brave lad! I will go softly into his room, and put all his clothes on my arm, from his hat to his boots. The jewel-case must be in them somewhere. We will cut all the fripperies into little bits, and we will share the treasure like brothers when we have found it."

"Go on then and fetch those clothes, we will wait for you here. And hurry."

"I am on my way," said Barbillion.

He went out of the barn and walked quickly and lightly toward the house where Jean was lodged. The latter took Pierrot by the arm, and dragged him along quickly.

"I know what is to be done," said he.

They re-entered the house by the same back way they had followed when they went out to listen to the conspirators in the barn, and as they walked faster than Barbillion, and as their way was shorter, they arrived a few minutes before he did.

Barbillion went up the stairway softly and opened the door so cautiously and cleverly that neither Pierrot nor Jean could more than barely hear it opening. But they saw what was going on by the glimmer of a dim night-

light, which could not betray them, as they were each drawn back into the room's darkest corners.

The traitor Barbillon tip-toed to the bed, and put out his hands to seek his master's clothes. Immediately, Jean ran to the door, locked it and tucked the key into his belt, and ran to help Pierrot, who was already at grips with Barbillon. They did not need to expend much effort in mastering him, for in his surprise he scarcely struggled.

"I will not lose time in reviling you, nor beating you," Jean told him. "But you understand that knowing your designs on me as I do, I cannot leave you this way. I beg you therefore to let your feet and hands be tied, with good grace."

"Sir, you are mistaken," answered Barbillon with the greatest coolness. "After the stroke of genius which you have just accomplished, I know not how, the affection I had for you is changed to veneration, and you may be sure I renounce all enterprises, jests, or wiles which might displease you, for the rest of my life."

"I don't doubt it," Jean answered, tying his hands firmly with a rope he found in a corner of the country room, while Pierre tied his feet with no less care. "I do not doubt it. But now I shall leave you here, unable to trouble my present plans, and you may be sure you will have the halter M. de Brantôme promised you, before long."

"Sir, I shall walk up the gallows-steps filled with admiration for the great man that you are, and blessing

God for having allowed me to know you. But once again, you are mistaken not to trust me."

"All right, all right," said Jean. "Have you anything more to say?"

"No sir, except that when I have regained the use of my legs I shall hasten to rejoin you, wherever you may be."

Jean did not answer, but fashioned a gag with a napkin, and applied it to Barbillion in such manner that there was no possibility of his calling for help. This done, he left the room, with Pierrot.

"Pierrot," said Jean, when they were in the courtyard, "There is nothing better for us to do than to go, and quickly, and continue on the way by ourselves."

"I agree with you," said Pierrot, "especially as I am now ruined with my men, since that devil was able to persuade them that I had duped them."

"Then let us be going, without delay. However, as it is certain that these wretches will run after us, I think we should go off afoot. We shall reach the gates of Beaumont tonight, enter the town at dawn, and try to continue our journey as quietly as possible, without falling into the hands of your mob again."

"That is well thought," said Pierrot. "Let us be going!"

And so Jean was once more on the road in fairly great distress. This time, his anxiety was greater than the day he roamed from wood to wood. Then, he only risked his life. The business was more complicated now, since he

had a mission to accomplish, which difficulties made honorable.

“ Ah! Magdelaine! ” he said to himself, bitterly, “ If you had been willing to wed me without so much fuss, none of this would ever have happened! I should not have gone into your garden by night, and so forth! And I should not be here, either! Ah, Magdelaine! Magdelaine! ”

While the unhappy lover cursed his fate in this fashion, he followed a little path that ran parallel to the road. For as neither he nor Pierrot knew the country, they did not dare to risk themselves along pathways which might have carried them far from Beaumont. They walked through the night — a cold, wet night — continually slipping and sliding on the greasy clay, and leaping ditches full of water, into which they fell more than once, so dark it was.

They had done right not to keep to the highway, for the two fugitives were pursued. Two or three different times, they saw some of the people of their company gallop past, looking for them along the road, and cursing like Saracens. But none of these honest warriors thought of going down the sides of the road, where they would probably have found what they were seeking.

At last, a dark mass took shape far away on the horizon, and the two night-travellers, approaching little by little, saw that it was a city, with its moats, drawbridge, towers, and even its cannons, whose muzzles peered over the walls.

"There is Beaumont, no doubt," said Jean to his former servant. "There is nothing more to do now but to wait until daylight to enter it."

"We shall not have to wait long, sir," Pierrot answered. "Dawn's first gleams whiten the sky, and if the weather were not so bad, we could see the sun now. But do you know, we shall be running great risks in presenting ourselves at the gate in our present costumes. I am sure they will take us into the guard-room and submit us to an embarrassing interrogation."

"By God you are right," said Jean. "But unfortunately I cannot change from the clothes I have on now."

"Because of the jewel-case?"

"The jewel-case, my good friend, exists only in Barbillon's head, but the letter is in my boots, and I do not know where else I could hide it so well."

Jean was sure of Pierrot's fidelity so long as it was merely a question of a piece of paper; but he was not so sure that a jewel would not shatter that probity.

"Then, sir, we shall try to do our best," said Pierrot.

By good luck, that day was market-day. A crowd of people of all conditions jostled each other to come in or go out of the city, and Jean and Pierrot, plunging into the center of the crowd, managed to cross the bridge and get past the guard without the sentinel or the soldiers on duty there noticing them.

Delighted and triumphant over their success thus far, they hastened toward a resplendent inn which stood at the other end of a large square, the sign of the "Golden

Sun," which bore the motto, somewhat venturesome in view of the condition of the weather, "The Sun Shines For All."

They were only a few paces from the blessed inn when suddenly they were perceived by a large gentleman, splendidly clothed and accompanied by several officers with whom he was engaged in loud conversation. The large gentleman, seeing Jean, looked at him attentively for a few moments, recognized him, and opened his arms to him with a cry of joy.

"Oh! Oh! M. de la Tour-Miracle," he cried, laughing. "Come and embrace me! What a happy meeting! I hope you will not leave us any more, now! "

Jean trembled with anger and pain at finding himself in the arms of such a warm friend, who was none other than the magnanimous Captain César de Bourbet.



XII

Fate begins to Jest More Pleasantly with Jean.

PIERROT had also recognized the Protestant officer. But by good luck, he did so before his former chief had had time to see him, and while César de Bourbet was gleefully absorbed in the contemplation of his recaptured prisoner. Pierrot, knowing only too well that the desertion of his men on the day of the battle near Lectoure was not something to be easily forgotten, and fearing for his neck, hastened to make the best of the moment's respite that was given him, and leaving his master behind, lost himself in the crowd and disappeared.

As for Jean, before he had found breath to say a word, the captain had presented him to the gentlemen present.

"M. de Mergéy, M. de Balard, allow me to present to you a young Gascon lord, a paragon of wit and valor. I have already told you of the ingenious manner in which he rid himself of my guardianship. Bear witness today to the no less marvellous manner in which he is returned to me! "

"But captain," cried Jean, more argumentative than hopeful, "by what right do you recapture me now? Am I not in a royal city? "

"Are you no longer a Catholic, my dear sir?" Bourbet answered.

"I am, and with all my heart," said Jean.

"Well, and here we are all good Protestants," said Bourbet, "officers and soldiers, all Huguenots here. The town is ours, however Royal you may call it. And unless your arm cuts us to bits, as Roland cut the Turkish armies, you must surrender."

The logic of this speech was unassailable. Jean bowed his head.

"Besides," Bourbet went on, "you must not be sad. We are very comfortable here, and lead a very pleasant life. You will dine with me, sleep in my chamber, and I shall take you to all the fine gatherings."

"M. le comte de la Rochefoucauld will be delighted to see you," said M. de Mergey.

"We shall play lansquenet," said M. de Balard.

"And today I shall take you to visit a lady of your acquaintance, a lovely widow, the sight of whom will not displease you."

"A widow?" said Jean, after blushing at the mention of a lovely lady. "If you are speaking of Madame de Peyrecave, she is not a widow."

"So she is, her husband was killed by a Swiss, in a skirmish. Sorrow suits the divine Corisande ravishingly well. But come, come, first of all I must present you to M. le comte de la Rochefoucauld, who commands us here."

Resistance was useless, and Jean found it more to the

point to appear gay, and not to sulk. He had good reason for this. Ill humor, besides the fact that it does not make friends, freezes and paralyzes the mind peculiarly, while gayety, on the contrary, keeps up one's hopes, sharpens the imagination, gently warming it, and hatches a continuous brood of plans and projects, one of which always succeeds in the end.

The Protestant gentlemen brought their captive into M. le Comte's chamber almost in triumph. This great lord, who was one of the most important leaders of the party at that time, had just recently been beaten, with the main body of the army, at the battle of Dreux, and had retreated to Beaumont. As this book has no argument to present on the subject of great political affairs, it befits us to leave aside all such considerations in regard to the personage before whom we find ourselves, and to say merely that he received our hero with his habitual courtesy. He confirmed Captain Bourbet's word, in giving the prisoner the city for a jail, and merely told him to present himself to him morning and evening every day.

"I am sure, sir," said the count at last, "that you will end by sharing our opinions, and that so wise and judicious a young man as yourself cannot fail to become our friend."

Jean contented himself with bowing to this compliment, and Bourbet, Mergey, and Balard took him off to their lodgings. We say *their* lodgings, because all three lived in two adjoining rooms, as the city

was crowded with troops, and lodgings were hard to find.

"My good sir," said Bourbet, "so you are going to live with us! I do not ask your word not to attempt to escape. I know that you are obstinate and would not give it. But I am going to tell you, so that you should not attempt it, all the precautions which we have taken to guard you. In the first place, one of us three will constantly enjoy the honor of taking part in your conversation. Then there will always be two sentinels beneath your windows; then also, your description has already been given at the gates of the city, and as you will come with us daily to attend the maneuvers, it will not be long before there is not a single soldier who will not know and watch you. Are you content?"

"Enchanted!" Jean answered. "How long will this delightful situation last?"

"Until we have rejoined the Admiral, which cannot be more than fifteen days from now, for we do not plan to live and die here."

"Faith sir, I confess, I am so tired of the life I have been leading for some time, and I appreciate your company so much that I resign myself to spending fifteen days with you. I give you my word of honor not to seek to leave you before that time has expired."

"Well!" said Bourbet, "Is that the way you take it? I shall yield nothing in the way of courtesy. You shall have a room by yourself, for I give you mine. I shall sleep with these gentlemen, and you can do what you

please besides. Only remember that we go to see the lovely Corisande at noon."

If Jean had submitted to his captivity with good grace, it was solely for the sake of Madame Diane's necklace. At all costs, he must take this precious jewel out of its hiding-place, for he could not think of keeping his boots on constantly, especially since his nocturnal journey afoot had put Captain Brantôme's clothes into at least as sad a condition as their predecessors. If a spy had constantly followed Jean, it would have been impossible to change the hiding-place of the jewel-case. By showing himself to be docile, he escaped the most pressing difficulties.

"Fifteen days pass quickly enough," our hero murmured, with a sigh.

M. de Mergey and the captain sent for a tailor, and Brantôme's clothes were soon replaced. Jean asked permission to see to his toilet, and to rest until noon. It was nine o'clock. Two hours of sleep were indispensable, he said, to recuperate a little the strength he had wasted in running all night, pursued by Protestants who had tried to capture him. This flight, and its result, provoked much laughter, and the unhappy traveler was left to himself.

When he found himself alone, Jean began by examining his room, to discover its disposition and location, and if anyone was hidden or could be hidden in it. It was a vast square room, with a great chimney-piece, and deep cupboards. There was little furniture besides the great bed, which might easily have accommodated five persons.

There was one window, giving on a little alley, and one door, that which gave into the room occupied by the three gentlemen. Jean concluded that his necklace would be secure against surprises.

After this reconnaissance, Jean hastened to unsew the top of his boots and take the jewel-case out. He hid it in the end of one of the cupboards, lifting the woodwork with his dagger, and then lay down. It is superfluous to say he did not sleep. Anxiety is not always a good soporific, although several great personages, so history relates, never slept so well as when their fortunes gave them cause to be apprehensive as to their immediate future.

At noon, Jean was awakened by his three companions, who shouted through the door.

"Come, sir," they cried. "It is time to get up! The ladies are waiting! I would bet the city of Beaumont to a dinner at Le More's, that they already know we have a new gallant to offer them."

Jean dressed, looked at himself in a pocket-mirror which Balard lent him, and found himself sufficiently well dressed (he did not lack vanity, as we know), to present himself to Corisande. He was deeply pre-occupied with this meeting.

But he still had enough anxieties; in the first place, that cursed necklace; and then, if it were suspected that during the interval between his escape and his re-capture, he had been in communication with a Catholic officer, what questions, and what suspicions would not follow? It

was already extraordinary enough to find him again in Beaumont, after losing him in Angoumois, and it was the more so if the story he had invented to cover that interval had been believed! Altogether, his position bristled with difficulties, and Jean was inwardly annoyed with the Seigneur de Brantôme's gallant and courtier-like imagination.

In such a condition of spirit, a great deal of natural good humor was necessary to feel one's imagination pleasantly roused by the idea of paying a visit. Jean would no doubt have preferred to find Corisande again under other circumstances, more pleasant for himself. But he was seeing her again, anyway, and it was very delightful. Not that M. Jean was in love with her in his thoughts, not in the world. Great Gods no! He felt a certain attraction, a certain leaning, a certain sentiment, the whole quite indefinable, and that was all. It fitted in quite well with his fidelity to Magdelaine, wounded it not at all, and merely made the sight of the beautiful, the ravishing sister of the late Gaspard Lescout precious to the happy young man.

As soon as Jean was dressed, his three friends took him away, and they came to a fine large house, that of M. le Comte, where the beautiful Protestant ladies who had come hither, some from the neighboring country, others from other parts of the Kingdom, following their husbands, met together.

It was a numerous gathering. The Comtesse de Roussy, M. de la Rochefoucauld's second wife — the same who

died in 1574 from a malady of the stomach, very much astonished that, with sixty thousand pounds of income, she could die of hunger — Madame de Roussy, we were saying, did the honors of the house. Among the beauties who surrounded him, Jean saw but one, which was as it should be, and he blushed furiously, even more furiously than he had blushed when he learned of the presence of such a beautiful person in Beaumont.

The three Huguenots brought their captive over to Madame de Peyrecave.

“Madam,” said Balard, “here is a slave who comes to pick up once more the chains laid on him by your lovely eyes.”

“I am delighted to see him again,” said Corisande, in a tone apparently quite forgetful of the death of her brother Gaspard. “I am delighted to see him again, and I will do what can be done to make his sojourn here as pleasant as possible.”

She made room for Jean beside her, and began questioning him, answering him, jesting with him, laughing, sighing, talking of a thousand things, in short, to say everything in a word, to bewitch him. Besides having the most beautiful eyes in the world, the widest and most eloquent eyes, she knew how to use them with infinite art, and Jean was bewildered, dazzled, mad, when Mergé came to seek him to join the play.

At first he wanted to refuse, but Corisande begged him, in a low voice, not to stay by her. “You will make gossip for the evil-minded!” she urged.

"Do me the service of going away," she added, laughing, and she accompanied her words with a look which brought complete disorder to the little reason Jean had managed to conserve.

Corisande rose, and, taking the arm of another lady who stood close by, went off to join the countess.

"Come, sir," said Mergey, "it is certainly good to be in love, and I never failed to be so, before I married. But it must not be thought that it is the only diversion there is, for so have some men lost their minds."

"I swear to you, M. de Mergey," said Jean in a serious tone which indicated that his soul was deeply stirred, "that I am not in love at all, as I have set my heart elsewhere. But I cannot deny that Madame de Peyrecave is the wittiest, most astonishing, most marvellous woman I have even seen, with only one exception."

"That exception seems to me to be losing ground," said M. de Mergey, "and I give her only two days to lose the last inch of her equity in your heart. Let us go and play."

"You are entirely mistaken in that," cried the young man, angered by such a suggestion. "I shall never love Madame Corisande, and if I even think of it, may all the most beautiful devils come to Beaumont by the cartloads to wring my neck!"

"Come, come, calm yourself sir, and sit here. Lansquenet, as you will see, is not any worse than a lady's conversation. Here are the cards, and pay attention, for we play high."

Jean drew the purse which Brantôme had given him from his pocket, and began to play.

He gave and took cards mechanically. His mind was elsewhere. There was a veritable storm raging in that southern soul, in which all sentiments whirled about at the mercy of one sentiment, which the young man struggled desperately not to recognize.

He was persuaded that what he was going through had never been felt before. It is the privilege of young beings to look on their discoveries as though they were quite new, and to imagine that the world was born with them. He inwardly confirmed all the vows he had made to Magdelaine, and did not any the less seek to catch Corisande's eyes, in the room.

He was stifling, in an extremity of agitation. The ravishing widow's eyes often encountered his, and pierced him with their burning glance. At the same time the happiest, the most embarrassed, the most deeply moved, and the most unwaveringly faithful of all lovers in the wide universe, he knew not where he was.

And during this time the game went on, and luck, incredibly capricious, favored him. He scarcely knew what cards were in his hand. He threw them one after the other, at haphazard. But luck was on his side, and guided his choice. What he did was exactly what he should have done. There were no cards so bad but that he profited by them, and while from the corner of his eye, and with his whole soul, he following the movements of Corisande, he

won, and kept on winning, and exhausted the resources of player after player.

Bourbet and several others had already left their seats, completely despoiled. Balard was driven out in his turn, then Mergey. Finally, the Comte de la Rochefoucauld lost three hundred pistoles. The game ended, and Jean put some three thousand *écus*, worthy spoil of heretics, in his pockets.

He was loaded down like a merchant on a buying expedition, and found his gold unwieldy. Everyone laughed at the jests he made on this account, and arranged games for next day. All the ladies found this young victor highly pleasing, and Corisande, so far as the proprieties would permit, let him know how thoroughly she was imbued with good will toward him.

Not a word had been spoken of Gaspard Lescout, nor of Pierre either. Jean did not think it necessary to speak of two unpleasant and past circumstances in his acquaintance with Madame de Peyrecave, who, for her part, seemed to have no desire to give the conversation a lugubrious turn.

The game and conversation had lasted a long time, and the gathering did not break up until after supper.

Jean returned to his lodging loaded down with treasure, with his three companions.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I hope you do not resent the good luck I had today. I will no doubt lose everything I have won tomorrow, and if not tomorrow, then the next day, for I am determined to let you

retaliate to the last pistole. So let us keep up our good humor."

"I took a liking to you at the start," said Balard, "and even while Bourbet was capturing you, I declared that you had the face of a gallant man. I believe I was a true prophet."

"Let us go to bed," said Mergey, "I am half dead from lack of sleep, for I took a reconnoitering party six leagues out, during the night, and La Tour-Miracle, who has not had any more rest than I, already seems to be sleeping on his feet."

"Your words are golden, my dear friend," Jean answered, "and I wish you good night."

"Good night, my prisoner," said Bourbet, shaking his hand.

"Good night, sirs, my gaolers," said Jean, and he entered his room with the just pride of a man who since he has been in captivity had won a fortune, won the favor of all the ladies, the friendship of all the men, and attracted the attention of the most beautiful person he has ever seen.

Now Jean lay on his bed and put out his light with more satisfaction than is usual to a prisoner.



XIII

Jean has Too Tender a Heart, and Embarks on an Affair the Outcome of which He Does Not Foresee.

 JEAN had not yet gone to sleep, but was beginning to fall into that sweet state of lethargy which so happily precedes the complete repose of the soul and senses, by giving a foretaste of it, when he was awakened by a sudden thought.

"If by chance," he said to himself, "I were obliged to leave without being able to take my jewel-case? Or else, if, before my departure, I should be constantly accompanied by someone, what should I do? My jewel-case cannot remain in that cupboard. I must keep it on my person."

He rose softly and went to fetch the torment of his days.

"I cannot put it back in my boots," he said to himself, "unless I am prepared to look as though I were ready to mount a horse, all day. If I put it in my hat! But one loses one's hat very easily in a brawl! It is very embarrassing! A plague on the Seigneur de Brantôme! Faith,

"I shall hang it about my neck, and it will be a clever fellow that looks for it there."

Jean tied the jewel around his neck and lay down again. As he thought of it, he warmly applauded his sagacity and ended by going to sleep with his soul completely satisfied, but wishful for an end to come to his adventures, and picturing a pleasant future for himself as an officer, and the husband of Mademoiselle Magdelaine. The best thing for him at this moment was sleep. He had great need of it. No doubt a modern lover would not have dared abandon himself to such complete forgetfulness of such delicate matters as those in which the heir of La Tour-Miracle found himself embroiled; for after all, by his own admission to himself, he was within two fingers of an infidelity. But these things were not examined quite so closely in those times, and besides, nature, exacting nature, has rights that cannot long remain unacknowledged. Jean, in spite of the very real disturbance of his soul, could not keep his eyes from closing, and what is worse, he did not open them again until full daylight of the morrow, when his three friends came into the room.

First of all, as was proper between such polite nobles, came great compliments and lively embraces. Then they discussed how they should spend the day. M. de Balard was not quite free, nor M. de Mergey either; it was their turn to command certain posts in the city; but as for Captain Bourbet, he was free to occupy himself as he chose, and he offered to play a game of Prince to kill time

until dinner. Jean was about to accept when M. de Mergé's valet came to tell him that there was a person at the door who wished to speak to him privately.

"Go, La Tour-Miracle," said Balard, "it is certainly some good fortune for you, and you must not let it escape through negligence."

In the depths of his soul, Jean almost admitted his friend's flattering supposition. He hastened down to the street, where he found a little lackey in sky-blue livery who bowed humbly.

"Sir," said he, "someone whose confidence in you is very great desires to speak with you on a very important matter, and asks for an immediate interview."

"My little friend," Jean answered, "I am quite at the service of the person who sent you, though I do not know who he may be. Tell him that I shall wait for him."

"Not so, sir," said the little lackey. "On the contrary, you must come to her, and if you will follow me, I will take you to the place where she is waiting for you."

"You know that I am a prisoner on parole, no doubt," Jean objected, "and that I cannot go out of the city. So tell me whether what you propose is in keeping with my oath."

"You may be sure of it," the lackey replied. "You may follow me without offense to your conscience."

On a sign from Jean, the messenger walked on ahead of him.

He made him leave the principal street, and crossed

two or three rather somber alleys, lined with shabby-looking houses. Finally he stopped before a better looking lodging, opened the door, and letting the cavalier enter, left him there alone to find his own way.

He did so without delay, and as the dwelling was not very large, he had no difficulty in finding a room furnished and ornamented in mediocre fashion, in which he discovered the lovely Corisande, walking up and down as she waited for him.

He was somewhat surprised by this meeting, but more delighted, and after having greeted the lady who was beginning to greatly occupy his thoughts, he began the conversation which she herself did not seem to want to open.

"Madam," he said to her, "I suppose that it is at your instance that I have been brought here, and if you have a mark of devotion to require of me, I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"Eh God!" Corisande answered, laughing. "What I have to tell you is difficult to express, and many other women would never have begun such an enterprise. But I am all sincerity, and I do not want you to be in a position to accuse me of not being frank with you. Do you think I am a coquette?"

Jean was profoundly astonished by the bluntness of the question. He understood better how to handle a horse or a sword than how to untangle human, and especially feminine, sentiments, so that he was somewhat troubled, and answered with his eyes lowered.

"Madam, if coquetry is a fault, I swear to you that you have none, for I see nothing but perfection in you."

Corisande made a little teasing gesture with her hand.

"All that is nothing but compliments, M. de la Tour-Miracle, and I should like to hear you speak to me as a plain man. Since you do not wish to be as I would like you to be, I shall tell you immediately that I am a coquette, and very glad of it. There are women who reproach me for it. I let them talk, and my reputation is firmer, and more shiningly pure than theirs. But I do not hide the fact that I like to dominate, and the servitors which my beauty and my charms acquire for me, I hold by my courtesy, which keeps them from being angered by my severity. I have many of those servants, and if you are frank, you will admit that you are one of them."

"Since you know things so well, Madam," answered Jean, "it would be useless for me to dissimulate. I agree then, that I have as much affection for you as is permitted me by other obligations I have elsewhere, to another person, whom I shall love and honor until my dying day!"

As can readily be seen, Jean was struggling against the power of Corisande's beautiful black eyes, which at this very moment were enveloping him with ardent flames. Madame de Peyrecave fell back into an armchair, laughing heartily.

"You are more in love with me than you will admit," she cried, nodding her head gently, "and I am very sorry for the beautiful person whom your flighty heart

has pursued thus far, for she shall have to find another friend. Jean, listen to me carefully, for I am going to be as serious as the subject with which I am about to deal. You remember under what circumstances I saw you the first time? Whether my brother Pierre was right or wrong, none the less you saw die, and die miserably, my poor Gaspard, the best, the saintliest of men, who took care of me in my childhood after I lost my mother, and whom you will never — oh you will never know what it is to love anyone so! ”

Two lovely tears stole like two pearls down Corisande's lovely cheeks as she spoke those words, and, crossing her hands on her knees and raising her eyes to heaven, she was most angelically beautiful.

Jean suffered a bewilderment, an access of tenderness, an intoxication. It seemed to him that the death of Gaspard Lescout was the greatest misfortune that had ever afflicted the universe, and he too began to weep.

“ You are good,” Corisande said to him, squeezing his hand, “ and I do not repent of having believed in your innocence from the first. I did what I could to calm Pierre. But if you knew that intractable spirit, if you knew how much unhappiness he had caused me, as the very opposite of Gaspard, you would pity me despite the cheerfulness I constantly pretend.”

“ He is a very disagreeable fellow,” Jean stammered.

“ After all,” Corisande continued, “ I am not sorry that from the first moment I felt an attraction to you that resembles my fraternal tenderness for him who is

no more, and from that time I never doubted that I would see you again, and make you feel some sympathy also. Jean, love is superfluous between us. Although the death of M. de Peyrecave has now set me free to give my hand to whomsoever I please, I am not thinking of marrying, and to make me change my mind many things which it would be useless to discuss would be necessary. Only I should like to be sure of your attachment."

"If it may be of service to you, madam," Jean answered promptly, "have confidence in it, and in me who, even in default of that respectful tenderness I feel towards you, would always find room in my heart for you. What is it that you want?"

"I want you to do me a great service. Do you feel inclined to it?"

"I do not lack desire, madam, but I am a prisoner."

"Do not let that worry you. If you were given back your parole and your liberty, would you be disposed to follow the instructions that I might give you?"

"One moment, madam," answered Jean. "I am your servant no doubt, but if this is a question not of you, but of the interests of your Protestant cause, it is too much to ask of me. For after all, I am a good Catholic."

Corisande rose from her armchair and came over to lean on Jean's arm.

"Let us walk about the room," she said, pressing his hand lightly.

The gentleman felt his emotion redoubling as he

walked side by side with the siren, silently waiting to hear what she had to say.

"You are intelligent, sir," she continued in an ingratiating tone, "and you are of good, and even of high lineage. It is therefore impossible that you should have no ambition. Answer me, are you ambitious?"

"Certainly, madam. Every Gascon has ideas that are worthy of his country, that is to say, greater than himself."

"Do not jest about it. It is a fine virtue. Since you are ambitious, I understand that my friendship alone could not suffice you, and that something more positive must be added to it. What would you say, then, if you were offered ten thousand gold *ecus*, and a company of men at arms, with a promise to do better by you in the future?"

"I should answer that such fine proposals make my mouth water, and that the means of accepting them would have to be very difficult to keep me from doing so."

"Difficult? Not the least in the world. It is only a matter, in this case, of recognizing a certain gentleman who will be presented to you at M. le Comte's this evening, as your brother. Tomorrow, your parole will be returned to you, and you will accompany M. Théodore de la Tour-Miracle to the camp of the Duc de Guise. That is all."

"I cannot imagine why there should be so much fuss and so many promises," said Jean. "There must be

something underneath that — you will pardon me for saying so, madam — that you do not want to tell me.”

“How well he guesses!” cried Corisande, leaning more heavily on Jean’s arm and allowing her beautiful curly hair to touch the young man’s neck lightly. “Did I not tell you that it was a very important affair? Know, then, that this gentleman is called Poltrot de Méré. He is commissioned by the Admiral to negotiate with M. de Guise. M. de Guise does not wish it to appear to the Courtains that he is treating with the Huguenots just when he is almost sure to take the city which he is besieging, and M. de Méré must pass for a Catholic until further orders. As the affair is close to the heart of M. le Comte, and especially as it is certain of a fortunate conclusion if M. de Méré can speak to M. de Guise, he does not hesitate to offer you, who would give him the means to conclude a peace, a rich recompense.”

“But I am not known to M. de Guise, and the gentlemen about him might as well take me for a Protestant in disguise, or for a suspicious person at least, as your M. de Méré.”

“You are mistaken. M. de Montluc has written to the court and told of your exploit, and your father’s, against us. Negotiations to exchange you had been opened with M. le Comte. As you escaped, nothing came of them.”

“All this does not seem very clear to me — pardon me please — but nevertheless I consent to do whatever you wish. I shall take M. de Méré to the camp, he will pass for my brother, and you shall be satisfied. I want no

other recompense. Only promise me that I shall see you again before my departure."

"Yes, you shall see me again this evening, and from this moment I accept you as my cavalier, and give you my colors, which you will wear for love of me."

She untied a ribbon of the color of fire which she wore about her neck, and threw it playfully into the young man's hands.

Jean kissed this ribbon ardently and thrust it into his doublet. Then Corisande said goodbye to him with a gesture, and opened the door for him; without which he himself would never have opened it, so occupied was he with kissing her hands. Then he went away.

"Never, I swear," said he to himself when he was in the street, "was ever a man seen who was more favored by heaven and the saints. Everything that happens to me is opportune, everything proves useful to me, nothing harms me, and catastrophes which would ordinarily break the necks of the luckiest men serve me for stepping-stones and raise me to the skies! The only circumstance that embarrasses me is my love for Magdelaine, for I can do nothing about it. That Madame Corisande is ravishing, and she carries away my heart and soul! "

Jean was right. Corisande agitated him peculiarly, and although when he was not in her presence his mind produced the most sensible and praiseworthy reflections on the danger of allowing himself to be possessed by such a lively sentiment, he could do nothing about it. The fiery ribbon on his breast burned him. Though he did not see

it, it was before his eyes, and he had pressed it to his heart twenty times as he walked along before he reached his lodging.

"You have certainly delayed long enough," Mergey said to him, "and the ladies who acquired such a fine opinion of you last evening will be in arms against you today, unless you can give good excuses."

"He will find good ones, no fear," said Bourbet, "for our prisoner is a golden-tongued Gascon who knows how to get along. I know it better than anyone."

When they arrived at Madame de Roussy's the first person who came to meet Jean was M. le Comte himself. This lord took his prisoner by the hand and led him to the embrasure of a window.

"Thank you, sir," said the Protestant leader, "for the signal service you are rendering us, or rather, which you are rendering France. I have no doubt but that some day you may boast of having brought peace back to this beautiful kingdom."

"I should be very happy to do so, sir," Jean answered. "And when shall I leave? When shall I obtain my liberty?"

"As soon as you please," M. le Comte answered. "But not for a few days, and you will know the reason for that delay."

"A few days let it be," said Jean. "Is there nothing to do for your service other than what has been asked of me?"

"No sir, that is all. But I will demonstrate further to

you how indispensable it is that M. de Méré should pass for your brother. The necessity is so great that, even before M. de Guise, who knows perfectly well what is being done, you must keep the secret, and never act otherwise. You may be sure that this extreme discretion, so rare at your age, will do you the greatest honor and give you a reputation which you will find very profitable in the future. I must now present you to M. de Méré. Follow me, I beg you."

As he said this, M. le Comte took Jean by the hand and led him through several rooms. At the entrance to a last room a man dressed in black met them.

"Well, doctor," said La Rochefoucauld, "your patient will soon leave you."

"Soon Monseigneur? So much the better for M. de Méré. He will be fit to be on his way without danger to his life before three days are over."

"Good," said M. le Comte, "all is well." As he lifted the portiere, he added, between his teeth, "but for M. de la Tour-Miracle's sake, it would have been better to leave tomorrow morning. Cursed fanatic, where does he get these useless stabbings?"

The room was dark, the bed heavily draped with curtains, but enough light penetrated to enable Jean to recognize, with profound surprise, between the pillows and the crumpled sheets, the pale face, sparkling eyes, and black beard of the charcoal-burner whom he had firmly believed he had sent into another world.



XIV

Jean Becomes a Very Happy Man in Love and a Great Lord, All at Once.

MDE MÉRÉ's memory did not serve him so well. He looked at Jean with an air of profound indifference, and did not even seem to be wondering if he had ever seen him. It is true that the elegant gentleman who was now being presented to him differed greatly from the fugitive he had spied in the forest. It would have been difficult to recognize one in the other. M. de Méré raised himself on his elbow and greeted Jean.

"I hope," said M. le Comte, "that you will get along well with your younger brother."

"I don't doubt it, sir," Méré answered in a curt tone. "And I do not think M. de la Tour-Miracle will have to wait for me more than a few days, and once at Orleans, I can assure him that I shall not inconvenience him very long."

These words were spoken with a sinister air and an ambiguous smile which did not please Jean. He contented himself with renewing his offer of his services in a general way, and as the conversation lagged, and as La Roche-

foucauld obviously drew little pleasure from the wounded man's company, the visitors did not take long to say goodbye to him and leave his room.

"Well!" said La Rochefoucauld to Jean, as they came out, "what do you think of your travelling-companion?"

"With your permission, sir," Jean answered, "there is something about his face, and his way of speaking, which I do not like any too much, and had I the choice, I would rather pass anyone else off as a member of my family."

"I understand perfectly," answered La Rochefoucauld, "and I am somewhat of your opinion. M. de Méré's face is not very prepossessing at first sight, and I quite distinctly noted with what an air of surprise you considered him as we came in. But you may be sure these first impressions always pass. M. de Méré is a very brave, and meritorious man, with many virtues. If he does not enliven your way with those fine stories courtiers know how to tell, he will edify you with discourses replete with wisdom, which are worth quite as much."

Jean made a grimace. He did not particularly care to be edified in general, and in the present circumstances, he knew what manner of man M. de Méré was too well to anticipate any great pleasure in his company. Fortunately, he had taken a firm resolve in this regard, and the future did not trouble him. The way in which M. le Comte spoke of consulting his brother astonished him somewhat besides. Either that lord wanted to deceive

him, or else he knew very little of the character of the man whom he praised so highly. In the first case, to appear to perceive the ruse might be dangerous, and lead to the withdrawal of that liberty which had so conditionally been returned to him. In the second case, Jean would have had to tell what he knew of the not very honorable existence of the sectarian, and there was much doubt as to the opportuneness of such a confidence. Jean found it prudent to abstain, to keep his fears and suspicions to himself, and to act as he had resolved.

“If Corisande and the count want to lead me into a bad business,” said he to himself, laughing privately, “they will be greatly disappointed.”

Jean continued his conversation with M. de la Rochefoucauld, bantering over the lugubrious physiognomy of several of the adherents of the new religion.

“You Catholics,” the count answered gaily, “are all such elegant fops that you despise everyone who does not wear velvet, and who has not a golden and keen tongue. Since you gentlemen of Rome are made so, you must be taken as you are, and so, I will leave my dear prisoner free to join the ladies. It will be consolation of a sort for him, I hope.”

They had arrived in the great hall, and the noise of a great number of private conversations, coming from groups of twos and threes here and there about the room, proved that the Huguenot gentlemen, whatever the count might say, were in no less happy mood than their Catholic adversaries.

As may be imagined, it was the work of a moment only to pass through the crowd and come to greet Corisande, whom he had spied from afar, for Jean was no less devoted to his beauty merely because he suspected her. Corisande eagerly brought her wily accomplice into the conversation, and sought to please him as much as before.

In spite of the lack of intimacy, which was impossible in a salon where so many persons' ears caught what was said and even what was not said, more than one look, more than one cleverly manoeuvred glance came as usual to inflame Jean's heart. What he felt was not that somewhat speculative passion which Magdelaine's calm beauty had roused within him; it was not that veneration which he had never ceased to feel for Mademoiselle de Castillac's noble virtues. It was a sort of fever, which mastered his soul, and to which he could offer no resistance. Reflection had no share in this new love; Jean's heart was not touched, moved, softened, raised to the heights of a celestial sentiment; no, it was an intoxication, in which nothing spoke, nothing lived in him, except hard passion, and that blind instinct which the wise men of old so greatly feared, and which impelled them, in their despair, to proffer such enormous blasphemies against women, whose beauty and intriguing could give birth to so dangerous a madness.

Jean flattered himself not a little, besides. Corisande loved him, he believed, and while for her part Magdelaine had never greeted him except with friendly raillery, he read tenderness in the eyes of the lovely widow, yes, a

tenderness like his own. This double fire consumed him. How could he doubt his fortune, when a marvelous beauty seemed intent on nothing else but pleasing him, and in the midst of the homage of so many people eager to serve her, seemed to accept only his vows? After the morning's interview, especially, and after all that had been said, and all that had been left to the imagination, Jean had but one thought — and it made him tremble, in seeing how his heart had changed — it was to be, some day soon, Corisande's acknowledged suitor.

His preoccupation pleased everyone. The countess gaily pretended to quarrel with him for it, and Bourbet declared that the unfortunate young man had need of distraction. He took him by the arm and led him to the gaming tables.

"Don't wait to be coaxed," said Corisande. "You may be favored by fortune today. You should not let that favor escape."

Jean obeyed, and began to play. He played as he had done the day before, in the same distracted manner, with the same luck. As on the previous day, he saw the gold pieces rolling toward him. As on the day before, chance was sole mistress of the cards. The game ended, he approached Corisande.

"Madam," he said to her, "here I am very rich. I intend to use my treasure to express, in the best way I can manage, my gratitude to my guards for the sweet prison they have given me. I should like your advice on the subject."

"Here is a gallant prisoner, there is no doubt about it," answered Corisande, turning to Madame de Roussy. "Do you not think, madam, that such fine sentiments deserve to be encouraged?"

"There is no doubt about it," the countess answered, "and it must be done. As for me, I approve M. de la Tour-Miracle's decision. And," she added, turning to him, "in what manner do you plan to show us your greatness of soul?"

"Greatness of soul?" said Jean. "The word is frightening, and in truth I would never know how to do all that it implies. But if you speak merely of my desire to show you how much, my dear ladies, I am your servitor, I can answer more fully."

"Let us not argue over words," cried Corisande, "and speak up quickly."

"Eh! My God, madam, there is no great mystery here. I simply want to invite you, and all the persons of condition in the city, to a ball which I will give on the great square the day after tomorrow. I choose the great square because it is the prison in which I was immured, and because I have no lodging in this city which would be more suitable. I only need your acceptance to begin my preparations."

"You may have it, with thanks," the countess answered, laughing. "My lovely Corisande and I shall do the honors of the celebration, if you wish it. I don't suppose you care much about me, but as for my companion, that is a different matter."

News of Jean's plan soon spread through the hall, and everyone came to congratulate him. All those from whom he had won money were half comforted for their loss, and M. de la Rochefoucauld complimented him in jesting fashion on the way he was acting toward a city which he commanded.

"If I had foreseen all this," said this lord, "I would have thanked Captain Bourbet for his captive, and my gates would have remained tight shut, so as not to allow a prisoner who wins our money and the hearts of our ladies away to obtain entrance to the place. Come, M. de la Tour-Miracle, since the die is cast, do not be in any way embarrassed. Give the finest possible ball, and hasten, for I do not know whether the war which is ravaging all the provinces of France will leave us at liberty to dance much longer."

"Ah sir," said Jean, "one is never so fit to fight as when one has just been tasting of pleasure."

The evening ended. Jean went off with his friends, and when he came to the house was told that someone was waiting for him in the courtyard.

"It is a sort of a soldier, who insisted that he wanted to go into your room," said the valet who imparted this news to him. "But he has such a dishonest face that I did not want to let him into the place without your permission."

"Faith, you thought well," said Balard, who had already entered the house; "for there is a rascal to whom I would not entrust one little ecu."

"Gentlemen," said Jean, "no jesting. It is my favorite servant."

And, in fact, it was Barbillon who rose from the head of an empty cask on which he had been sitting and ran to throw himself at Jean's feet.

"It is I, my good master," said that excellent servant. "I know quite well that you have reproaches to make me, but what would you? One is only young once, and although I am at least forty according to my late mother's calculations, I am still young. But I am none the less attached to you."

"You deserve to be turned over to the town-provost, arch-scoundrel."

"No doubt, sir, no doubt; but you would not have the heart to deliver me, a good Catholic if ever there was one, to a Huguenot justice. It would be contrary to all religion."

"What do you want here?" cried Jean. "You no doubt expect me to take you back into my service?"

"Just so, sir, just so. I cannot live without you. Here it is two long days that I have been seeking you, and I do not think many servants would do that for their masters."

"Who is that rascal?" said Mergey.

"It is a man who has but one fixed idea," Jean answered, "and that is to rob me."

"And you keep him?"

"Yes, because he is brave as a Cæsar, and because he saved my life once."

"Twice, sir," Barbillon interrupted, with a certain pride. "And I flatter myself that a few blunders might be excused on that account."

"Let us see," Jean answered him. "I shall keep you in my service, but on one condition, and that is that I find you as intelligent and clever as you are thievish."

Barbillon took on an air of importance.

"You may be sure of it, sir."

"Then come into my room, and I will give you a few errands to do."

Jean informed his servant of his plan for a ball, and asked whether he felt capable of directing the work necessary for the buildings which are indispensable for such affairs.

"Sir," Barbillon answered, "among the trades I have followed, I have been carpenter and joiner. So I can promise you that everything will be done in the best possible way. As for the decorations for your ball, I confess that I understand that better than anyone, for I was once in the service of an Italian painter who did a great deal of work for the court ballets. Now as for refreshments, pasties, pastry, bonbons, and all sorts of delicate things to eat, and for the liqueurs and sherbets and ices, I take charge of them without hesitation, for I spent three years in Venice, and acquired a great reputation there for my talents in that direction."

"With so many resources in your head and in your fingers," said Jean, "how does it come that I found you carrying a halberd?"

"What would you, sir," Barbillion answered, raising melancholy eyes to heaven, "Misfortunes!"

"Say rather, every sort of crime, wretch! But that is not the question. Keep your promises to me, and you will be well satisfied with me."

With these words Jean sent Barbillion off, without any further thought as to what would become of him, confident that incomparable good-for-nothing would find some means to spend the night under cover. When he found himself alone, he sat down to his table. He wanted to simplify the rather tangled position in which he found himself in relation to the two women to whom he had vowed eternal love.

He thought nothing could draw him out of the muddle better than facing things frankly, and telling them so in the same way. He resolved, therefore, to write two letters, one to Magdelaine, and one to Corisande.

So he took pen and ink, arranged his paper in front of him, dipped his pen in the black liquor which has made and unmade so many things in this world, not to speak of love-affairs, and sat there a good quarter of an hour before he found a suitable phrase with which to begin his letter to Magdelaine. It was only the first sentence, he thought, that would be difficult to find; the second would come of itself.

The first sentence came at last. The second failed to arrive. He was forced to take great pains to find it, and the third and those that followed were no less difficult. At last, when the letter was finished, Jean read it over,

and found it so ill-conceived, so poorly thought-out, so badly written, that he tore it up and began another.

It was not the last, but tiring of the struggle, he allowed one to stand that was not any too much of a model of eloquence or of logic, but which said about what he wanted to say, or at least so he flattered himself.

“Mademoiselle,

“I am the unhappiest of men. I beg you not to believe that I could ever fail to have toward you the sentiment of that passion which I have never ceased, and never shall cease, I tell you, to nurse within my soul for her who first set beating this heart which I have devoted to you. But by a mischance which I bitterly regret, I was carried away to another shore, and although I know how wrong I am, I cannot resist the current which bears me away, but believe me, I am not forsworn. I most ardently desire to find myself near you one day, and to clearly explain to you those sentiments which you may find reprehensible, perhaps, but which will always be the same toward you, that is to say, that though a new situation may lead to your misunderstanding me, I will nevertheless always be your impassioned and very respectful servant,

“JEAN DE LA TOUR-MIRACLE.”

Our hero could find nothing better in his head, and he experienced a strong feeling of envy of the ability to compose such letters easily, possessed by the illustrious

courtiers about whose marvellous writings he had heard so much the past two days at Madame de Roussy's.

The letter to Corisande was not so difficult, and was written all at once.

"I love you, madam, with more ardor than I can tell. In a few days, I shall be going away from you. Tell me a few words to comfort me; give me some token that I have not made a mistake in devoting my life to you. Ah, Corisande, nothing will be able to prevent me from returning soon to fall at your feet; at your feet to which I wish to enchain myself for ever! It is to assure you of this that I dare to write.

"In my absence, do not forget the too-fortunate
"JEAN DE LA TOUR-MIRACLE."

Less dissatisfied with this piece of eloquence, and feeling the need of having someone to share in the impetuosity of his passion, Jean went in and awakened Mergey, whom he had found more sentimental than the others, and would have spent the best part of the night reading and commenting on his letter to this gentleman, if the latter, too sleepy to bear it any longer, had not finally taken him in his arms — for Mergey was a veritable giant — and carried him back to his bed, after which Jean at last ceased chattering.



XV

Jean's Affairs Begin to be Entangled; as for Barbillon, He Displays an Unsuspected Genius.

NEXT morning, the first face that Jean saw on opening his eyes was Barbillon's. The Lorrainer Bohemian stood straight as a picket beside the bed, waiting for his master to awaken.

"Well! Barbillon," said the gentleman turning over on his pillow, "have you thought about what we talked of last evening?"

"About the preparations for our celebration, sir? Eh! Eh! I have done more than think about them, and if you wish, you might take a turn about the square for the sake of the air, and you will see that we are already well advanced."

"What?" said Jean, jumping out of bed. "You have started work already?"

"I dare say I have," Barbillon answered with a satisfied grimace. "You will be satisfied when you have seen."

"Do you hear, gentlemen?" Jean shouted at the top of his voice. "Do you hear what my servant tells me? He says everything is well started already."

"Let us go and see that," Balard answered. "There is nothing like a walk to sharpen the appetite."

When they came to the square, the four cavaliers with one voice rendered homage to Barbillon's genius.

"You see, sir," the latter said to his master, "that I have not spared myself. When I left you, I went to inquire where the master carpenters lived, I gathered them together, and here they are at work."

"This is very fine, but, rogue, you did not wait for my instructions."

"Sir, I pride myself in understanding matters of taste somewhat better than a gentleman like yourself, who only left his province yesterday. Let us examine my arrangements, and you will tell me whether you could have done better.

"Here will be the ballroom: a large square structure, supported by columns, such as I saw in Florence one day when the duke of that city made a magnificent entry. This structure, gentlemen, as you see, will be above three rows of steps, suitably spaced, which we call Corinthian and a Latin word which escapes me at the moment. At the top of the colonnade we shall put a great number of flags and banners, which I have already ordered, and whose fine colors will rejoice all eyes.

"Here, at the four corners of the square, will be four pavilions, where everyone may obtain all the refreshments they may desire; I have enrolled thirty scullions, for whom I shall presently order thirty turquoise-blue silk coats, with silver lace. We must be magnificent.

"There, we will have a game of tilting at the ring; there is nothing in the world that pleases young gentlemen so much. And there will be a stage, on which I shall perform a number of fine tricks of legerdemain and juggling, such as have never been seen in this country, in my master's honor. Finally, there will be another little temple in which I shall play, all alone, a famous Spanish comedy which I saw played at Pampelunos.

"The festival will begin at nine o'clock in the morning, and I answer for it that the day after tomorrow, they will not yet be ready to clear the square."

Barbillon terminated this magnificent description with a bow from the right hip, fists clenched, left leg thrust forward.

The four gentleman began to laugh, and the Huguenots swore that the arrangements did, in fact, seem marvelous.

"But," said Jean, after a moment's thought, "will we have enough money for all that? It is true that I have won heavily, but it seems to me that you have planned things of such heroic proportions that faith . . ."

"Do not worry about that," said Barbillon, "I am a resourceful man, and so long as I am in your good graces, all will go well. But I have also thought about your dress."

"That certainly was a good idea," cried Jean, "for I have not yet had the time to think of it myself."

"The coat you have on, sir, is very fine; but it is not fine enough, and in two hours I shall bring you a tailor

with four or five complete and altogether appropriate outfits. And now, permit me to leave you, for I shall never finish all I have to do in time if I stop to talk any longer."

"You have a treasure in that lad," Bourbet exclaimed, while Barbillon was making off at a quick pace.

"I confess," Jean answered, "that I did not know all his fine qualities. But, to compensate for them, he has plenty of not inconsiderable defects. This afternoon, gentlemen, I am going to follow my rascal and see for myself how he goes about things."

And Jean effectually set himself on the track of Barbillon, who was walking in the direction of the little street to which the little blue lackey had conducted our hero the day before. On arriving before Corisande's house, Jean stopped in spite of himself and remained a few moments in mute and amorous contemplation.

"Who knows," he said at last, "who knows whether she may not be there at this moment? Or if I might not find someone who would talk to me of her?"

He took a few steps toward the door, and was about to knock, when suddenly it opened to emit a young man dressed in a green doublet, who walked down the steps with the proud and impertinent air of a very happy man.

The fire of jealousy immediately entered Jean's head. He stopped a moment as though he had been thunder-struck, his eyes fixed on the unknown, and incapable of taking a single step forward or backward. In a moment, his heart was penetrated by the keenest anguish. He saw

himself deceived, humiliated, baffled, sold. Self-love as well as love, anger as well as pain, were awakened in him. He felt himself falter and turn pale. An icy sweat covered his every limb, and he might have been afraid of fainting at any moment, had he thought of it. But he thought of nothing, and felt nothing, but the betrayal of his love.

This terrible state did not last long, in truth, but it continued too long to allow him to give vent to his fury; for when it occurred to him to run after the unknown young man, whether the latter had made incredible speed, or whether, which was more probable, he had gone into some nearby house, Jean could not find him. He ran through all the streets in the neighborhood looking closely at everyone he passed, spying into every window; but he did not find the young man in the green doublet.

After a good half-hour of useless searching, it occurred to him that he might be mistaken.

“Why should this man have come to see Corisande, and even if he did see her, who says he is my rival? Can no man come near her without being her lover? Did she even see him? Did she not send him away? Why catch fire like the match of an arquebuse, before making inquiries? It would be well worth the trouble to do so!”

He went into the house, and found the little blue lackey sleeping on a bench in the hallway.

Jean had sometime heard tell that secrets easily escape from the lips of a man awakened with a start. So he approached the little man softly, and taking him roughly

by one ear, lifted him to his feet, shouting at him in thunderous tones.

“Who is it that just left your mistress?”

The lackey cried out with pain and fright, and struggled to escape from the jealous man’s hands.

“Sir, sir,” he cried, “I do not know who has just left my mistress, but I know very well that M. Pierre Lescout is with her.”

“The devil,” said Jean, as he went out the door, “let us not do anything foolish here. If I am going to meet that animal, I can do no less than cut off his ears for the way he hunted me, and as I am in love with his sister, a quarrel would not benefit my affairs at all.”

He went sadly out into the street and met Mergey, to whom he told the story of his adventure. This gentleman laughed at him, and assured him that Corisande was the most virtuous woman in the world, and that there had never been the least stain on her reputation.

“You are very fortunate to have put your heart in such good hands,” the Huguenot ended. “Any jealousy would be out of place here. Your man in the green doublet may have been coming out of anywhere, or if he was visiting your mistress, you should be reassured by the presence of Master Lescout.”

Poor Jean did not ask more than to be reassured, and in the end he almost succeeded, and relied on the explanation he planned to obtain from Corisande at Madame de Roussy’s after dinner.

He did not obtain it, for Corisande did not appear;

Jean was told that her brother's arrival had probably prevented her.

Jean was very sad all evening, and withdrew early, using the preparations for his celebration as an excuse. Everyone gathered about him, everyone cajoled him, but nothing had any effect on him. Monsieur le Comte and Madame de Roussy made use of all their charms, but these had no effect on their prisoner, who scarcely paid any attention, and returned home in very surly mood, to find Barbillion there.

"Sir, I have waited for you since morning, to have you try on your new clothes, and you did not come. You did wrong, for one should not neglect those things. Look at this silk doublet, colored like the dawn; these embroidered stockings; these others trimmed with gold lace. The devil if you've ever seen anything smarter. And then, as I was told that you were going to make a journey, here is a suit of buff, with a light cuirass, a felt hat, and a fine cloak, which I have had prepared for you."

In spite of his ill-humor, Jean could not keep from smiling and approving his servant's attentions.

"Ah! Barbillion," he said, "if you were not such a horrible bandit, you would be worth a great deal. How are our preparations for the morrow?"

"Everything is done, sir. There is only my rôle to be gone over, and a little ventriloquist turn which came back to me, and which I will study tonight. But what is the matter with you? You look sad. Are you sorrowful, are you ill? Corbleu, sir, you must not let yourself go and

become melancholy like that. If you will wait a quarter of an hour, I shall go into the town and see if I can't find a mandolin, and I shall sing you a song that will make you cheerful again, you may be sure."

"Leave me alone, hangman. I have no need of being cheered. Go where you will, to the devil if that pleases you, and do not torment me any more."

Barbillon hurried out, delighted that he had such a master. He went to hurry the workmen. He did not content himself with showering interjections and invective on them; he put his own hands to work, and helped to smooth out all difficulties that came up. Toward midnight, all the carpentry was finished.

Then Barbillon ran to the upholsterers. He inveighed like a madman against the lazy ones, the rogues, who were going to fail in their promises to his master, the greatest lord of Gascony. He took off his coat, as he had done with the carpenters, and set to measuring off the stuffs with a show of activity which electrified the workmen. He had wine brought to them, he told them stories, in short, he kept them awake by his inexhaustible gaiety, and even by his insults. When the bulk of the work was finished, he took his whole brigade to the square, and began to place each piece of cloth, each carpet, in its place. Whenever he saw the work was going well, he disappeared for a quarter or half an hour, and, withdrawn into one of the pavilions, he rehearsed his various rôles, made faces all by himself, testing their exhilarating influence on himself by standing before a mirror. Then,

certain of success, he would come back to his men and start all over again, and with more energy.

Jean spent his time in a very different manner. He walked all about his room, with great steps, and every moment struck his head with his clenched fists. His situation seemed to him to be so dark, so complicated, that he knew not how to take it. Was it sad, or was it gay? The day before, this morning yet, nothing was more clear to him. He was in love and loved, and treated with goodwill by his captors. But the mere suspicion of Corisande's infidelity showed him his situation in an entirely different light. He did not consider the fact that he himself had some little notion of deceiving his dear mistress in the affair of M. de Méré, and he despaired as though perfidy were not of this world.

"Let us see," our hero said to himself. "Let us try to discover what all that means. Supposing that Corisande does not love me. Why, then, would she have made me believe the contrary? For a very simple reason. She had plotted with M. de la Rochefoucauld to plunge me into an intrigue in which I would serve them as a beast of burden, which carries but does not know what is on its back. They tell me that M. de Méré is going to negotiate a peace with Monseigneur de Guise. Is that true? I have already said no to that question. That rascal looks more like a cut-throat than a negotiator, to me. The chances are great that I am being led into an evil adventure here! Fortunately, I have thought of that. But what have I done to them, that they should put me in the

way of breaking my neck? There is something pretty black! ”

Anxious and jealous, Jean suspected everything. In reality, the betrayal of his love pained him more than fear, and illogically, he forgave Corisande much more easily for endangering him than for giving him a rival. To this may be added that the idea of her infidelity made his suspicion of danger still stronger.

“ If she has played a comedy with me in everything, where does she want to lead me? ” he asked himself.

Poor Jean was very much exasperated. At this moment, he was distrustful of everything: not only of his mistress and of M. le Comte, but of Bourbet, Mergey, Balard, and of all the ladies and gentlemen who had run after him with their attentions for the past two days.

“ I have been too happy,” he thought, “ and I have been a gull to believe that these damned heretics could ever act in good faith.”

After much lamentation and a great deal of self-pity, he saw that there was nothing better he could do than to conduct himself according to his original plan, which it is useless to describe in advance. In it, he saw a means of avoiding all the consequences of the plot laid against him, if one existed. He saw that if, on the contrary, all those about him were sincere, a circumstance which was almost inadmissible, his plan would in no way harm any of the great designs which M. le Comte might be meditating for the happiness of the kingdom.

Jean calmed himself; no southern heart can boil for long.

Dawn appeared, and scarcely had its first rays gilded the spires of the cathedral, the churches, and the convents which had been abandoned by their inhabitants and were now occupied by Huguenot soldiers, than the blare of trumpets and the din of cymbals awakened everyone.

Barbillon was up, for the excellent reason that he had not gone to bed, but he had dressed himself in pomp, and over all he wore a hat with feathers of a thousand colors, which made him look like one of the most brilliant of tropic birds.

The lesser people crowded about the barriers, which were guarded by halberdiers, who isolated the scene of the celebration from profane approach. A few heads of burghers and burghers' wives appeared at windows, in their night-caps.

Barbillon believed it incumbent on himself to make a short speech.

"Peasants and good burghers of Beaumont!

"I announce to you that my good master, the illustrious Baron Jean de la Tour-Miracle, the most magnificent lord in the world, today gives a splendiferous proof of his munificence, in inviting you all, as many as may come, to eat and drink more than is good for you! Here, outside the barricades, are barrels of wine, casks of cider, and as much bread and meat as you can wish. Amuse yourselves, good people! Monseigneur de la Tour-Miracle and I wish to see only happy persons today!"

A long hurrah answered this discourse. The trumpets and cymbals began their din again. So Jean, at the peak of his pain and embarrassment, found himself by his own will the benefactor of all the city, thanks to his servant Barbillon!



XVI

Fortune Takes a Sudden Turn, and Jean Spends a Disagreeable Evening.

HE sun must be very merry at dawn of a festive day. The valiant Phoebus must greatly rejoice to shine in all his splendor on good-humored faces, since by ordinary he sees so many surly ones. No doubt it comforts him to see old men regain the gaiety and curiosity of youth; children twice as turbulent as usual; and the young girls running about in flocks like young pheasants, laughing, mocking, coquetting, primped up, and adorned with all their ribbons, bantering with their lovers and making faces at them. It is one of those rare occasions on which the sun is surely less bored than usual with his sad rôle of shedding light on us.

All the town of Beaumont was merry from the peep of dawn, in expectation of the fulfillment of Barbillon's promises. The period of waiting, in truth, was somewhat prolonged, for it was not until ten o'clock that the ladies of quality, escorted by their gentlemen, their friends, their husbands, or their brothers, began to arrive, some on horseback, some in litters, in the great square, with

a great following of servants. The Huguenot garrison had also, as garrisons do in modern times, furnished its share of splendor for the ceremony, and acting on the principle that there can be no good holidays without blows, the halberdiers took real pleasure in holding back the too ardent and too curious crowd. They distributed thwacks to the general satisfaction of all concerned. The laughter redoubled, and the arrival of the noble company was greeted with great applause and a shower of good wishes.

Then Jean de la Tour-Miracle came out of the main pavilion, very gallantly dressed, after Barbillon's taste, followed by MM. de Bourbet and de Mergey, who were to assist him in his functions as host, stepped forward to give his hand to the Comtesse de Rochefoucauld, and assisted her to dismount at the entrance to the square. At the same time, all the ladies left their palfreys, to the accompaniment of a blare of trumpets, playing "Mars and Venus are off to the wars!" Among all these lovely ladies Corisande shone in the full splendor of her beauty, and it is unlikely that radiant Phoebus looked on her with less pleasure than on anything else that day. Flowers were charmingly set against her marble bosom; plumes undulated over her black hair. She was beautiful enough to ravish the most brutal Cyclops.

Nor did Baron Jean view the charms of his beautiful mistress without being stirred to powerful emotion. But Baron Jean, as we know, was a man who stood firmly by what he had resolved, and although he felt his mistrust

melting away before the splendor of all these charms, he was determined to be on his guard. He firmly repulsed the idea of giving Corisande the letter he had prepared for her, and which was to have decided his future.

"Let us admire!" he said to himself at last. "Let us be smitten, since it is not in our power to escape this enchantment; but let us not act foolishly!"

This is a very difficult rule of conduct to follow in love: a rule which the people of the north could never follow, any more than could the people of the extreme south, and to which it is scarcely even in the power of the inhabitants of the south of France to adhere.

However, Jean permitted himself to serve as equerry to Madame de Peyrecave; he helped her to dismount, and even received her in his arms when she jumped down, and afterwards responded with more warmth than his reason might have dictated, perhaps, to the delicious pressure of the lovely coquetting hand.

Fortunately, there was no present means of abandoning himself to the dangerous attractions of intimacy. Corisande and her maneuvers could do nothing against the crowd which surrounded La Tour-Miracle, and did not allow him to forget his duties as host. Soon, a voice he recognized spoke to him.

"M. le Baron, only your orders are awaited to begin the tilting at the ring."

Solemn in mien, majestic in diction, Barbillon, respectable majordomo (for he was majordomo on this great day), deeply impressed by the importance of his em-

ployment, swept the ground with the feathers of his cap, bending from his hips.

Despite his good resolutions, Jean had so many things to say to his dangerous adversary, he so greatly desired to obtain some light to throw on the suspicions that filled his soul, that this quite natural interruption was peculiarly unpleasant to him. Neither could the rather impertinent glance which Barbillon threw at Madame de Peyrecave escape him, and it increased his ill-humor. He promised himself to find a good opportunity to make this impudent rascal, whose services were so necessary to him at this moment, pay for his insolence, and meanwhile submitted to the advice of his counsellor. He escorted M. de la Rochefoucauld, the countess and the ladies to the box constructed for their use, and the tilting began immediately.

All the time that this warlike *divertissement*, in which he avoided taking part, went on, Jean, half-hidden in a corner of the platform, carefully observed the faces of those who might have some influence on his destiny, and so remarked, with little pleasure, a sort of intimacy that seemed to exist between M. le Comte and Corisande, and between Corisande and Bourbet. Two or three times, out of the corner of his eye, he caught them glancing in his direction, while a scarcely perceptible smile flickered over the beautiful lady's lips.

"They are playing me for a simpleton," Jean said to himself; "but who laughs last laughs best. I am not yet in the trap. God's blood, let us put on our armor!

Against glances and ambushes! Let the siren do as she wishes, let her do it, Devil's blood! She will see what will come of all this! "

The day passed in amusements like all other amusements. Thanks to Barbillon's attentions, which continued to increase, everything had a marvelous success. The refreshments circulated in profusion not only within, but without the barriers also, and if Jean had had the leisure to watch what was going on, he would have conceived some quite serious doubts as to the possibility of meeting so many expenses. But Jean was thinking of still more serious things. After the tilting came the comedy, in which Barbillon distinguished himself, and, alone on the stage, succeeded in arousing hysterical laughter. In truth, in an obscure garrison town, where amusements had up to then not been very abundant, there was no call for anyone to be critical. Everyone was very indulgent toward the however slightly grotesque efforts of the former lansquenet, and yet the rascal's naturally comic face, clownish verve, and imperturbable assurance would have sufficed to cheer the most melancholy spirits. Finally evening came, candles were lit everywhere in the pavilions, the ball commenced, and the gaming started.

It would be useless to enumerate the *passe-pieds*, *bourees*, and even the *chacones*, in which more than one lady displayed her charms; or to expatiate on the *sarabands* in which Balard distinguished himself. Everyone had a very, very pleasant time. Jean was the only one who

could not say as much for himself. He confined himself narrowly to his rôle of dissimulation and observation. Torn between love, resentment, and fear, when he met Corisande's eyes, he responded to the teasing tenderness of their appeal first by a studied look, and then by a seriously love-lorn stare, muttering between his teeth:

"She is a diabolic angel!"

As he passed behind a portière, he heard Bourbet's voice.

"When do they leave?"

"Tomorrow morning," M. de la Rochefoucauld answered.

"Good, they are preparing for the catastrophe, for certain," said Jean to himself. "What fury! What have I done to them? What do they want of me? And that miserable Méré! The greatest rascal in Europe, I swear! It was disgracefully clumsy of me not to have killed him in the first place. Ah! If I had been able to foresee what is happening now, I would gladly have made sure of him! But they are not so sure of obtaining their desire as they think, and I will make them see the way more clearly."

Balard came to take his arm.

"Well, our host!" he said, "we do not tempt fortune's favors this evening?"

"Surely," La Tour-Miracle answered, in a deliberate tone.

"Well," Balard went on, "come to this table. You will find your principal victims here, and we will do all we can to relieve you of your spoils."

"I shall give you an ample revenge," said Jean, "and you might hurry to impoverish me, for I shall not remain with you for very long."

"A few hours will suffice to drain you dry," said a big Flemish captain who had been very badly treated in the preceding days. "As for me, I shall not leave the table except to go and put your money in my coffer, or to go and throw myself in the river."

"A noble determination!" cried Bourbet. "It is mine also. Come on, my prisoner, watch yourself. We are going to teach you how to live."

"Much noise, to little effect," said Jean, smiling, and shuffling his cards. "I have everything you wish, play the game."

And the game began. La Tour-Miracle had been so lucky, on the previous evenings, and fortune had so obstinately devoted herself to his service, that the possibility of the capricious lady turning on him in the manner which is so usual with her did not occur to him. He was somewhat arrogant in prosperity, and took it for granted that fate would make extraordinary efforts to serve him.

But his adversaries, on their side, had banded together and borrowed money from right and left, and had sworn rather to sell their horses, and even to the coats on their backs, than allow the Catholic prisoner to leave with a single half farthing of their money. The game that was being played was therefore an interesting one. Several of the ladies had been told of it, and Madame la Comtesse,

giving her arm to Corisande, approached the table to watch the combat.

At sight of his perfidious mistress, Jean paled and made an involuntary movement as though to quit the table.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Mergey, holding him back by the arm: "Do you lack heart? Do you want to quit us? You cannot do that."

"I am not dreaming of it," said Jean, a little ashamed of himself.

From the adjoining salon, the sound of the orchestral violins and the noise of cadenced dancing feet was heard. The game went on in mournful silence.

"These gentlemen look as though they were in a battle," said the countess.

"It is even more dangerous," said Corisande, "for they think more of their money than of their skins."

No one answered. A round had just been played, and Jean had won. Balard thought this circumstance a baleful augury, and in spite of the presence of ladies, he allowed a vexed oath to escape him. The game continued, and for a moment, no one said a word.

Suddenly, the Flemish captain cried out:

"It is not for you to take, La Tour-Miracle, it is mine."

"I do not think so, sir," Jean answered.

"I am certain of it," said the captain.

"It would be singular if I were mistaken," said Jean, "but we can appeal to the judgment of the ladies."

"I am the ladies' servitor everywhere except in play," the Fleming returned, "and it is sufficient for me to speak, to be believed."

"Come, no quarrels," cried Mergey. "Let the round be null."

"I pass it to the gentleman and I pay," Jean interrupted. "It will not ruin me."

He was certainly mistaken, for, from that moment, his luck changed. He lost, lost, and lost again. He doubled, and lost. He tripled, and lost. Everyone was laughing. Drops of sweat formed on Jean's forehead. He felt that by his persistent good fortune, he had awakened envy, and that envy was rejoiced by his fall. His pride revolted, and he felt a sort of dark fury tormenting his soul.

At that moment, raising his eyes, he met Corisande's lovely glance, which seemed to be contemplating him with a tender air. The good will in it was so real, the tenderness expressed by those charming eyes so warm, that he was troubled. All of a sudden, he completely lost sight of the phantoms that obsessed him.

"What does this mean?" he asked himself. "Is she sincere?"

Since he loved her, he was altogether disposed to believe she was, and in his unhappiness, it was a great relief. Joy filled his heart once more. He took courage and, putting his cards down on the table a moment, he passed his hands over his face, rubbed them vigorously together, and pulled up his chair.

"Come, gentlemen," he cried gaily. "I am not yet drained dry!"

"There is a brave gentleman," said a young lady behind him. "It is a pity that he is losing."

"That he is losing," was well said. For Jean continued to watch his pieces of gold and silver leaving his pocket one after the other, to go to enlarge the piles that were forming before his adversaries. After a moment, he had completely forgotten the courage with which he had armed himself. He might look as often as he pleased into the eyes of Corisande, which continued to encourage him, his losses became more irreparable every moment. At last, he had only half a score of gold nobles left in his possession, when he heard Barbillon's raucous and impertinent voice saying:

"Really, sir, you are playing a fine part there! Can you not see that these honorable gentlemen are cheating for all they are worth?"

And Barbillon, still with his inseparable plumed cap on his head, in the calmest manner in the world, pointed his finger at Bourbet, Balard, the Flemish captain, and one of the count's equerries.

Jean had already had some suspicion of unfair play. He rose, and threw his cards on the table.

"By all the devils, sirs," he cried, "if you are cheats I am not inclined to continue."

"There are no cheats here except you and your acolyte," Bourbet answered. "Here it is eight days that

you have been cheating people who are worth more than you. Keep your juggling tricks for elsewhere! ”

“ Sir, if I dared advise you,” said Barbillon to his master, with a modest air, “ it would be to put your sword through the bellies of these fine players.”

“ You are right, by God,” Jean replied, “ and since I have but two gloves, take it for granted, gentlemen, that you have each received one in the face! ”

As he spoke, he had retreated, as though to give his enemies the field. The ladies had fled, weeping and crying out. A few fainted. The Comte de la Rochefoucauld came running.

“ What, gentlemen! ” this lord cried, “ I hear that you are insulting my guest! I will not suffer matters to go any further. Calm yourself, Baron! There is some misunderstanding here. Your servant is a rascal who deserves a thrashing. M. de Balard, Captain Bourbet, if you answer the challenge, I shall make you feel my displeasure! ”

“ A good hypocrite,” said Jean to himself. “ He is reserving me for a better trap.”

The ball had come to an end. The ladies had gone. Corisande had followed the Comtesse de la Rochefoucauld without Jean, in his anger, having noticed it at first. The challenged officers stopped out of respect for their chief, pulled their bonnets down over their eyes, and, threatening Jean with their looks, left all together, hands on hips, with triumphant gait.

“ You are to leave this morning,” said M. le Comte to Jean. “ Things are going along perfectly. There are

too important interests dependent on you to permit me to allow you to waste your efforts with blunderers. M. de Méré will wait for you at dawn outside the town gate on the Orleans road. I have no need to remind you that you may count on my friendship in everything."

Having spoken thus, M. de la Rochefoucauld went out in his turn, and Jean found himself alone with Barbillon, in the deserted hall. The candles seemed to him to throw lugubrious shadows. Among the long and floating draperies that hung everywhere about, he felt as though he were under a catafalque. He was very tired, and let himself fall into an arm-chair. Barbillon sat down in front of him, and did not attempt to disturb his reveries. On the contrary, the discreet servant settled himself comfortably in his chair, put his cap on the floor, and went to sleep, with his eyes fixed on his plumes. About an hour went by in a deep silence.

At the end of that time, a noise from outside awakened Barbillon with a start. A medley of confused and raucous voices approached the pavilion, and the improvised majordomo jumped to his feet and went out. If Jean had been less lost in thought, he could have heard the noise of a lively altercation. But he paid no attention to it until Barbillon came in and said to him:

"Sir, it is the tradesmen who have heard that you are soon leaving, and have come to ask for what is due them."

"Ah! Great gods!" cried Jean, plunging his arms up

to the elbows into the pockets of his doublet, "I have nothing left! I have lost everything!"

"Oh! Oh!" said Barbillon. "So you can pay nothing?"

"Nothing," Jean repeated, in consternation.

"There is nothing in that to make anyone desperate," the servant answered. "But since we have no money, we must absolutely find some wit."

And, crossing his arms and raising his eyes to the ceiling, like an astrologist in search of a planet, Barbillon stood very pensive for a few seconds.



XVII

Barbillon's Wit Develops More and More. Jean Extricates Himself from an Intrigue in a Novel Enough Fashion.

WELL now let us see, sir," said Barbillon, "have you thought of anything? I am curious to know how much more wit you have than I." "Tell these merchants," his master answered, "that it is impossible for me to pay them at the moment, but that I am an honorable man, and that they will lose nothing by waiting."

"Come, sir, I shall tell them that," Barbillon replied, with a burst of laughter, "and I'll lay to it they will be well satisfied! Zounds! What a genius you have for business! But though I am quite sure they will be delighted as it is, have you nothing left in your pockets that I might show them at least? I should not like to see you taken for a pauper."

Jean brought out his ten gold nobles.

"It is always something," said Barbillon, with a wink.

He put out his hand, took the pieces and put them in his doublet, then concluded in an efficient tone:

"I shall arrange this business of yours."

He went out of the pavilion and found the worthy merchants muttering against the cold night air, and blowing on their fingers.

"My good friends," he said to them with a paternal air; "Monseigneur le Baron is in private conference in regard to a secret and very important matter, at this moment, with Monseigneur le Comte and other gentlemen in high places. You will understand without explanation, therefore, how impossible it is for him to come out and listen to you. But reassure yourselves, I shall settle with you for him. Let us go into this little temple, in which a very distinguished comedian performed marvels of juggling today, and we will soon put our little affairs in order."

"Is it true, M. de Barbillon, that you are leaving this morning?" asked the carpenter.

"Monseigneur le Baron leaves this morning, but I shall not join him until this evening. We are going to the court. If you have any errands, I might take charge of them. Do not be backward. Give me your supplications and petitions. I see the King face to face, and speak to him as I am speaking to you, more than thirty times a month. Have you brought your memorandums?"

"Yes, yes!" the choir of creditors answered enthusiastically.

"And have you also brought paper and ink, so that I may discuss, correct, reduce, and settle the said accounts?"

“Yes,” the good burghers answered again, but less enthusiastically.

“Come then, my children,” Barbillon continued, settling himself in an arm-chair, “approach fearlessly, and let us hasten, for I am preoccupied with other very important matters. I can only give you a few minutes. *The upholsterer’s account*: to tapestries, silks, stuff of every color, total two thousand five hundred livres in Tours currency; good! *Wine merchant’s account*: a thousand livres, that is not unreasonable. *Carpenter’s account*: three thousand eight hundred livres; the wood was not of the best quality, but it does not matter. *Cooks’ and caterers’ accounts*: two thousand two hundred livres. I believe I noticed some fowls that did not taste as well as I might have desired, but I won’t split hairs. *Tailors’ accounts*: six thousand, nine hundred and fifty-four livres; perfect. Sum total of all these accounts: fifteen thousand four hundred and fifty-four livres in Tours currency. My friends, I am sure that you are very honest. At the same time, it is improbable, that, knowing my master’s immense generosity, you should not have padded your little expenses. I forgive you, and content myself with reducing our debts to just eleven thousand livres. You cry out? We will bring them down to eleven thousand livres, and as I am in a hurry, I will diminish them still more if you are not reasonable, to make up for the loss of my time. Besides, though you are thieves, I think you are very queer people. You clamor when I pay you in cash? Oh, oh! That word silences you! Yes, cash! Give me a scrap of paper and you will see.”

He wrote:

“M. le capitaine Bourbet, M. le capitaine Van Coeck, and M. de Balard, will pay this day, before noon, to each his share, the sum of eleven thousand livres of Tours currency, to the bearers of this note, from the twenty-five thousand livres which M. le Baron gave them last night to settle his expenses.”

“I will sign for my master: ‘Barbillon.’ With this piece of paper, you can collect your money whenever you wish. Besides, if there is the least difficulty, I will be there to see to it, for it is chiefly on your account that I shall not leave Beaumont until this evening. Go, worthy fellows, and may heaven guide you!”

Barbillon rose and dismissed all the creditors with a gesture, whereat they went away well satisfied. Barbillon himself was no less satisfied, for he robbed his master of ten gold nobles, and enriched himself with a good trick which it would be very pleasant to relate over the pots to friends of his own stamp.

He went back into the pavilion.

“Sir,” he said to Jean, “your idea was very well received, and the merchants are counting on your promises.”

“The first thing I shall do when I am home with my father,” Jean answered, “will be to send them what I owe them. But it is time to go now, for it will soon be dawn.”

“In any case, sir, you cannot think of going on the road in the elegant, light dress that you are wearing

now. I shall go and find your coat and your buff, and your other things."

"Go, and don't get yourself killed by those wretches who robbed me."

"Everyone who robs is not wretched," Barbillion insinuated in an irritated tone. But without developing this paradox any further, he went off to the Huguenot lodging, and awakened the three gentlemen rudely, regretting, he said, that he was unable to enter his master's chamber without going through theirs.

"God's body," cried Balard, "I feel like breaking a good stick over your shoulders, ragamuffin."

"And if you try," Barbillion answered, "I have my sword, and I will disembowel you. But why make so much noise? You resent the fact that I warned my master of your subtleties, whereas on the contrary you should thank me for having waited so long before I spoke."

Balard jumped out of bed and seized a chair to chastise Barbillion; but Bourbet and Mergey having begun to laugh, Balard found himself in a ridiculous situation.

"Come, sir, instead of trying to harm each other, let us reason together a little. You have won all my master had. He has not one red half-farthing left to go on. Be generous, and do something for him."

"Leave us alone, and your master too," said Balard, getting back into bed. "Were you not going to ask us for alms?"

"It is a deal I want to propose to you. I will sell you all my master's wardrobe, aside from his buff, his boots,

and his linen hose, for fifty *ecus*. It is well worth two hundred, and you will profit by it."

"Now that is quite reasonable," said Bourbet, rising in his turn. "Take your fifty *ecus* and a good journey to you! Try and let us not see you again!"

"I commend you to God, gentlemen," Barbillion replied.

He went down the stairs and came back to his master, whom he assisted in changing his clothes. As he had a great love for this good master, some scruples presented themselves to him when Jean, coming out of his reverie, said:

"Do you know, Barbillion, that I have nothing at all in my purse, and that I do not know how we shall manage to eat on the road?"

Barbillion made a heroic effort.

"Here are twenty *ecus* that I found in your pockets, sir," he murmured in an uncertain voice. "It is enough, if we live soberly, to carry us on our journey."

"Give them to me," said Jean. He was all dressed, and now he buckled his sword belt, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and threw his cloak over his shoulders, and left the pavilion, followed by his servant.

At the barrier entrance, he found the little blue lackey, and involuntarily stopped to hear what the knave might have to say to him.

"Sir, here is a note which you must read without delay."

Jean took the note. It contained these few words:

"Do not follow your companion. You have been deceived. Hatred and frivolity have compromised you; repentance seeks to save you."

"Fortunately," Jean thought, "I did not wait for this freak of repentance to decide on my course. She confesses her perfidies, the traitress!"

The little blue lackey had disappeared, and Jean did not run after him, but continued on his way, and arrived at the town gate, where he was stopped by the sentinel. The chief of the post, when called, recognized La Tour-Miracle, and having told him that a gentleman, a friend of his, was waiting for him outside the ramparts, he had the postern gate opened for him and wished him a good journey.

A hundred paces out, Jean found M. de Méré, his servant, and four horses, waiting for him.

"A thousand pardons for my delay," said Jean.

"Enough of compliments," answered the Huguenot. "Mount your horse, and let us go."

"There is a man who is not particularly polite," thought Jean; "but I will teach him how to live."

The little troupe set out. Our hero resolved to observe his companion as closely and well as possible. Now the best way to observe anyone is to make him talk, and he resolved to do so.

Meanwhile, daylight had advanced, and Jean looked attentively at M. de Méré. He was a tall man, and dry, with a yellowish face. His nose was hooked like a kite's;

his lips were so thin that scarcely a narrow bluish line appeared. When Méré opened his mouth the remains of a few teeth scattered about in disorderly fashion could be seen. The owner of this prepossessing face wore the turned-up moustache fashionable in those times, and the tuft of beard under his chin was trimmed into a point. But this beard was a sparse collection of black hairs, as harsh as boar's bristles. Aside from that, there were lines of prodigious strength in that disagreeable face and misshapen body, and Jean did not fail to perceive this. He opened the conversation.

"For such a strict Protestant as you, sir, it must be a disagreeable task, to approach Monseigneur de Guise."

"I am no longer a Protestant," Méré answered, in a hollow voice.

"Bah! You are no longer a Protestant?"

"No! I have been converted. I do not like to be questioned. Act accordingly."

"And I," Jean answered, "never take advantage of advice which I receive without having asked for it. But if you wish to keep my company, mister brother, try to act more decently, or we shall have unpleasant arguments."

Méré threw a sideways look at the audacious fellow. Then he went so far as to suddenly stop frowning, and his mouth even twisted into a smile.

"I agree," he said, "that I am not very lovable. I have been in camps much oftener than in courts, and I have read religious books much more than romances from

which one might learn to speak pleasantly. Besides, I am just out of bed from a quartain ague. I beg you to excuse me."

"He does not say a word that is not a lie," thought Jean. "I know your quartain ague, since I gave it to you."

After this mental reflection he did not speak, and Méré did not try to revive his animation. Barbillon held the rear-guard with the servant, who seemed to be as taciturn as the master. Following his praiseworthy custom, Barbillon began to sing a guard-house song. M. de Méré turned back two or three times, obviously impatient, but he did not say a word, and Jean, who followed his every movement and sought its explanation, translated this patience thus:

"He wants to avoid any quarrel. With a face like his, no one can avoid being quarrelsome. The poor man is restraining himself. He will stifle if I do not take pity on him. Come, I am far enough away from Beaumont to please him as well as myself. Let us get to business."

He looked at Méré again. The man carried his head bowed on his chest. He became even more yellow. His eyes shone like carbuncles. He seemed to be in ecstasy.

"What can he be thinking about?" said Jean to himself, seized with an indescribable emotion.

In spite of himself, he continued to look at him for some seconds. Then, recalling himself:

"It is the right moment," he added; but he delayed

once more, thinking of Barbillon. Should he make a sign to his faithful servitor? It would be courting failure.

“Bah! Barbillon — I’ll always find him again.”

Jean leaned quickly over to his right, seized Méré by the boot, lifted his leg suddenly and violently, and tearing the bridle from his grasp with his other hand, precipitated him onto the surface of the road. Then, almost at the same moment, he put both spurs to his horse and taking Méré’s horse along with him, galloped off down a tree-shaded road which he had just perceived branching off to the left.

“Provided,” said Jean to himself, as he gained ground, “that Barbillon does not let himself be taken! In any case, I’ll break the head of whoever is pursuing me.”

Just then he heard the galloping of a pair of horses behind him, and put his hand to his pistols. But it was only Barbillon, who had faithfully followed his master’s example, dismounted the servant, and was now galloping up, roaring with laughter.

“Eh! God, sir! God, when you get such a fancy as that, warn me, at least! Fortunately, I was watching you, and I threw that servant across his master’s body in pretty fashion. Where are we going, so fast?”

“To Anet, of course; you know that is where I am traveling!”

“Bah! I thought the beautiful Corisande had made you forget it.”

Despite the seriousness of his situation, and the rapidity of his course, Jean took occasion to apply a vigorous

cut with a switch across Barbillon's back. The servant did not even blink.

The two adventurers ran for three good hours, until the sight of a tavern at the foot of a hill suddenly inspired Barbillon with sedentary notions, which he did his best to make his master share.

"Sir," said he, "we have neither eaten nor drunk since last night's supper. I will not hide from you that I am almost exhausted, and that it is time to do something about it. What have we to fear? We left our people afoot on the highway, two good leagues from any inhabited place. Even supposing that by an unheard-of chance they found horses two minutes after our departure, they will have plenty of choice of roads to follow, to pursue us. And then, we must give our horses a chance to rest if we want them to carry us any farther."

"Let us have breakfast then," Jean answered, "but as quickly as possible, and do not get drunk."

Jean would not allow Barbillon to sit down for breakfast, knowing that if he did so, he would never finish. Then, taking the inn-keeper aside, he talked with him a few moments, and then came back to Barbillon.

"Here are my orders for you," he said. "You will go to the Camp before Orleans as fast as you possibly can. There you will address yourself to some officer, and give warning to mistrust a certain La Tour-Miracle, whose real name is Poltrot de Méré. You will relate our adventure, and when the scoundrel arrives, you will take good care to point him out. I warn you that what I am order-

ing you to do is of the highest importance, and if you fail to carry out my command, you may be the cause of a great disaster."

"But, sir," Barbillion answered, scratching his ear, "what is it to you if this Méré does or does not plan some evil stroke? It is not your affair. Leave him alone, the worthy man! "

"Do what I tell you, and do not argue. Your horse is rested. Leave me with the three other mounts, and go! "

Barbillion did not answer, but jumped into his saddle and went off at a spirited trot. When Jean had watched him out of sight, he asked the inn-keeper for the guide he had promised, and set out in his turn, having sold two horses for a quarter of what they were worth.

He was very joyous. He had escaped from the hands of the Protestants again. The necklace was still about his neck. A very short distance now separated him from Anet. He fell into the most delightful reverie, and, more than half undeceived as to Corisande, he fervently recalled Magdelaine's image to charm the rest of his journey.

While he was thus given over to amorous thoughts, Barbillion was far from obeying his orders. That extremely independent rascal had gone about half a league, and then returned to the inn at a leisurely pace.

"Faith," said he to himself, "the wine is fair, and the girl pretty. I see no reason why I should not spend a day or two there. I shall eat some of my little savings there,

and then I shall go and spend the rest in some city, without meddling in the affair between the Catholics and Protestants, which is a lot of nonsense, and does not concern me. When I have nothing left, I shall be very glad to rejoin my good master.”



XVIII

*Jean Comes Happily to His Journey's End, and
Becomes the Confidant of Very Important Plans
Relating to the Destinies of France.*

HE poets of the XVIth Century have vied with each other in the celebration of the magnificence of the castle of Anet. They have praised its marvelous architecture, its sumptuous grace, its imposing aspect. They have spared no hyperbole in describing the interior of the fine manor, and they have even thrown the magic veil of their imaginations over the country round-about: the plains, the slopes, the magnificent game-filled forests, that formed its domain. Later, Vaux and Trianon excited a lesser fervor, and roused less enthusiasm. Vaux was the splendid creation of a powerful financier; Trianon, the charming idea of a queen who loved solitude and the woods. But Anet was much more than this to the poets who loved to evoke in its galleries the amours whose tender will caused the edifice to rise.

Those amours no longer dwelt there on the day that Jean de la Tour-Miracle presented himself at the great castle-gate. All, to the very last, had taken flight; and,

it must be confessed, the poets had followed them. Since the death of Henry II, Madame Diane, who had, in any case, reached the age at which ordinarily the most beautiful women can no longer have any illusions as to the vanity of human affairs, had dismissed the brilliant crowd which never left her while she was in favor, and she seemed to do all she could to hide her life from the courtiers. Moreover, the way in which the former charming ruler's days were passed was absolutely unknown everywhere that the court ordinarily sojourned, at Paris, at Blois, at Amboise. It was vaguely known that she still lived, that she was still beautiful; but she was not mixed in any intrigue, and no one had any time to think about her. Queen Catherine had taken kindly the frank determination with which her rival had yielded the field to her, and she had never either tormented or worried her. And after all why should Madame Catherine have kept any resentment for the lovely Diane? The whims of her royal spouse's heart had never meant very much to her. The power of government was her only dream and her sole desire, and she knew that it was not the favorite's fault if it were not granted her; neither was she ignorant of the fact that the King, having proclaimed her "the greatest blunderer that ever was," might renounce his love affairs, but would never allow her a hand in the management of the state. That was how Diane and Catherine had ceased to fear each other in not seeing each other any more. The Queen of France had plenty of other things to do, in this year of grace 1563, than to

wreak vengeance for the wounds inflicted aforetime on her doubtfully sensitive soul.

As to the queen of beauty, she had taken her part courageously once again. The day that the King died, she left the court, carrying a hurt with her, she said, which thereafter would make all the blows and buffeting of fortune light to her. She had come to her castle of Anet to shut herself up, and had never again left it. She had admitted only a small number of tried friends to share her solitude.

It was about six o'clock in the morning when Jean de la Tour-Miracle, leaving the highway, started down the great avenue that led to the castle. He could already see from afar off the battlemented walls and the majestic gateway. Delighted at finding himself at his journey's end at last, and almost persuaded that neither Huguenot nor vagabond would now come to renew his captivity, he saw everything through an enchanted glass; and without casting a backward thought, he quickly regained all his natural good humor. What particularly pleased him was the idea of having saved the necklace from all perils, and of being able to present himself to his godmother proudly, as a man capable of undertaking a difficult adventure and bringing it to a successful conclusion.

"Bravo!" he said to himself. "I have managed well, and I'll back myself a hundred to one against older and more experienced cavaliers. I maintain that Captain Bourbet, Lescout's Huguenots, Pierrot's body-guard, La

Rochefoucauld's soldiers, and Méré, were all hard fellows to escape from. But thanks to my star and cleverness, here am I, free! ”

After having awarded himself a few laurels for his merits, he was seized with some regrets in regard to Magdelaine.

“It will be a long time before I see her! Weeks, months, perhaps a whole year. It is not a very gay thought. But fortunately my heart has wholly returned to her. I have no more sentiment toward that false, that perfidious Corisande, and may all the devils in hell carry me off by the hair, if I ever give her another thought.”

At this moment, he remembered the two letters he had in his pocket, the ardent declaration to Madame de Peyrecave, and the ambiguous confession addressed to Mademoiselle de Castillac. He took the two epistles and tore them into a thousand bits, which he sowed among the high grass that lined the avenue.

A few moments later, he was before the great castle entrance. The bridge was lowered, but the gate closed. Jean called out loudly to the gate-keeper.

“Hola! Hola! Heh! Someone! Open the door! ”

“What do you wish, sir? ” said a sentinel who was walking on the battlements.

“I ask admittance.”

“There is no admittance here. Who are you? Whence are you? What do you wish? ”

“I am Madame Diane's godson. I come from the other end of Gascony, and I am charged with an important

errand. Now that you know all that, you will admit me, I suppose?"

The soldier had withdrawn. There was a moment of silence, after which the door opened, and the gate-keeper appeared. He was a big domestic, round as a barrel, looked as though he knew how to live, and squinted like a man who has lived at court, and knows how necessary it is to observe people.

"Sir," said he to Jean, "I am very sorry to have kept you waiting. But you will understand that in these unhappy times, when so many evil-intentioned people are running about this country, it is well to take precautions. I beg you to come into this lodge, in which I live. I shall go and tell the equerry of your arrival."

"Sir gate-keeper," Jean answered, "it seems to me that these are very tedious formalities. Do your best so that they may come to an end, that I may ask breakfast, and finally that I may be presented to my lady god-mother sometime this morning."

After thus peremptorily expressing his desires, Jean entered the gate-keeper's lodge and sat down before the chimney. Although the morning was far advanced, it was an autumn morning, and Jean found it pleasant to put his spurred boots up to the merrily flaming logs.

Finally the gate-keeper reappeared, accompanied by a grave personage with white hair.

"Here is Madame's equerry," he said, "M. Meurongy."

He was a little old man, with a very honest look, a

wrinkled and somewhat witty-looking face, and singularly inquisitive eyes. He was very polite.

"Really, sir," he said to Jean, after returning his greeting, "you must find our way of greeting visitors, and especially those who, like yourself, are relatives, very inhospitable. But what would you! It is necessary to take precautions, especially when one has the honor to serve so high and important a lady as our mistress. Accept my excuses, I pray you, and do me the pleasure of coming up to my apartment, where we shall breakfast together if you please."

"I accept with gratitude," said Jean. "But when shall I be able to see my lady godmother?"

"Let us see," M. de Meurongy returned, "Madame Diane is now at the chase."

"What?" cried Jean. "At six o'clock in the morning?"

"Every day, whatever the weather, she goes out riding at five o'clock," the equerry went on. "It has been her custom all her life. She will return at seven o'clock. She will hear mass; then she will begin her toilet, which invariably lasts until noon. Then will come dinner. I do not think there is any reason why you should not have the honor of greeting Madame Diane at the hour when she usually receives us, that is to say, at three o'clock."

"Three o'clock let it be, but that is a long wait!"

"I shall try to make the time as short as possible for you, my impatient young man," said M. de Meurongy.

"Let us leave Patru's lodge, if you please, and go to my apartment."

While they crossed the courtyard, Jean and his guide met several gentlemen. The Gascon cavalier noticed, not without surprise, that all were of an age that was more than ripe. White locks abounded, and grey hair was not common. As for black, blond, or chestnut hair, he saw none. And what struck him further was the air of reserve and ill-natured politeness with which these worthy persons greeted each other.

Once in M. de Meurongy's apartment, La Tour-Miracle forgot all he had observed, and only saw the well-served breakfast-table, as, for a few moments, his grave companion left him free to satisfy his appetite. But soon he began a conversation that bristled with so many interrogation points that Jean, cursing his curiosity, almost thought himself in the hands of a lieutenant of the criminal service. But he ended by bowing graciously to his questioner's will, and told him all that could interest him of his father, himself, and his recent adventures.

It was the story of M. de Méré which seemed particularly to interest the old gentleman.

"There," he said, "is a circumstance from which it might be possible to derive some profit."

"How is that?" asked Jean, pouring himself a drink.

"I can see it perfectly," the equerry went on. "The time is perhaps not distant when order will return to France; when we shall see mighty ones bowed down;

when the beauty of beauties, the greatest lady in the kingdom shall regain the uncontested power which . . . but it is useless to say more. I will add, however, my ardent friend, that your admirable godmother is surrounded by servitors who would give their lives for her, and that, with aid such as that, fortune cannot always be contrary to her."

"I understand you less and less," cried Jean. "Do you mean to say, by any chance, that my lady godmother is menaced by any danger? If that is the case, count on me as on yourself, I am ready to . . ."

"Good, very good. You are worthy to know my noble projects. I am certain that they will please you. But, for the moment, silence and discretion. Here are several of our gentlemen coming to visit me. Be reserved with them. Treachery or stupidity are about to invade my chamber."

"The devil," thought Jean, "if I understand a word of all this. I seem to guess, however, that there is even more intrigue going on here than at Beaumont."

At that moment, he saw four or five gentlemen come into the room. All were old, all were ceremonious, all of fairly morose aspect, with the exception of one only, whose sharp red nose, chin like a wooden shoe, and small, piercing grey eyes, betrayed a sardonic enough humor.

After reverences and compliments, Jean saw the conversation begin on the subject of the rain and the weather. There was some discussion of the events of the

day, but with great reserve, and he could see that everyone was watching everyone else. The one point on which everyone seemed in accord, was to speak of Madame Diane in a tone of profound adoration. Her name was never mentioned without a shower of praise, and it must be confessed that Jean, finding himself in an atmosphere so impregnated with respect, felt the veneration he had for his godmother, and his impatience to see a person who could inspire such enthusiastic sentiments about her, grow.

After a very short conversation, the gentlemen retired.

"Now, my dear friend," M. de Meurongy said to Jean, "I must leave you also. I must see to the duties of my position. I invite you to walk in the gardens, to visit our fortifications, in short, to find all the pleasure you can in such a celebrated place as this. When Madame Diane desires to see you, I shall not fail to let you know. A last recommendation: avoid, above all things, giving your confidence to any of the honest people who have just gone out. You do not know them yet. Be prudent and mistrustful."

"I promise you I will," La Tour-Miracle answered.

M. de Meurongy shook his hand and left him, and Jean went down into the gardens, and wandered about in them with great pleasure. He never tired of admiring the winding paths, the views, the innumerable statues, the marble basins in which swans floated.

He had stopped before a vast stretch of water when

he was joined by the sardonic gentleman whose face had seemed to betoken more wit than the long faces of Madame Diane's other servitors. Jean was not yet very clever at reading faces.

"You are alone, sir," said this gentleman, who called himself M. de Beaugeois. "You are alone, and I will wager you are thinking that solitude is much preferable to the society of a lot of old fools such as you have just seen."

"Oh, sir," cried Jean, "what you say does not indicate a high opinion of my intelligence, or of my respect for you!"

"Bah!" M. de Beaugeois continued, raising his eyes to heaven and shrugging his shoulders. "Can it be otherwise, when one hears a master fool like that Meurongy retailing the most ridiculous chimeras to you? I suppose the great politician has already confided his plans and projects to you?"

"Not that I know of," Jean answered, very curious to learn at last what it was all about. "But he gave me a glimpse of many things. But I have not yet, I confess, been able to form any definite opinion."

"He must blush at his nonsense himself, when he has a moment of lucidity, for he is not yet as inept as M. de Plissé, our majordomo. That you may judge of their dreams yourself, sir, just imagine, they believe they can put Madame Diane back at the head of affairs by contracting an alliance with the Huguenots! What do you think of that?"

"To tell the truth, I see little sense in it," Jean answered.

"The imbeciles!" M. de Beaugeois continued. "As if the Protestant leaders had any desire to share their loot with anyone. What would they give Madame Diane, pray?"

Here M. de Beaugeois shook his head again, like a man impressed with the imbecility of what he reprehends. Jean did not make any comment, for he saw his companion had not finished his speech. And, in fact, the old gentleman soon went on.

"After the two numskulls whom I have just mentioned, we have still another party, that of M. de Vertois. This brave man believes that Queen Catherine would willingly ally herself with Madame Diane to combat at the same time the ambitious Catholics and the intriguing Huguenots. What do you think of such an idea as that?"

"It does not seem to me to have much chance of success. But if M. de Vertois is the only one to extol it, I cannot see what danger there can be in it."

"Eh! Eh! Do not think so. Vertois has been able to win Madame Diane's first chamberlain to his party, and it is to be feared that through the influence of this wretch, who is a downright villain, he may some day succeed in leading our adorable mistress into making a false step. It would be better, however, if Vertois were to be trusted than the unworthy Pourus, a wretch, who, be it said between us two, is capable of anything. He ad-

vises an alliance with the Guises. I believe he is in their pay."

"My God, sir," cried Jean, "you frighten me. I am in despair at learning that my lady godmother is surrounded by such evil servitors! Would it not be better to stay at peace, and forget that King Henri II, of glorious memory, ever lived? Really, sir, if my age allowed me to express an opinion here, I would think that when one has such a fine castle, a park like this, and a man of spirit like yourself with whom to talk of a thousand interesting things, the best thing that could be done would be to renounce ambition, especially when circumstances no longer permit a sensible head to hope for anything from that direction."

At the opening of this little harangue, M. de Beaugeois had smiled, then he had frowned, and then the compliment had softened him. A minute went by, and then he spoke again. "I believe you are seriously in error, M. de la Tour-Miracle," he said. "All France adores Madame Diane, and unless one would be a traitor, one must agree as to the immense influence she has in every province. Moreover, it is my opinion that an army should be raised and put in the field against all the parties, without looking for any alliance. The advantages of such a determination would be innumerable, and I will tell you them."

M. de Beaugeois launched into a series of arguments to which Jean paid little attention, dominated as he was by his feeling of profound astonishment at so much madness. After a good hour of loquacity, while M. de

Beugeois was describing to his patient audience the future taking of Paris and abduction of the King, a page came to tell Jean that Madame Diane was asking for him.

Our hero found himself somewhat reanimated by this news. His blood, which had congealed in the course of an altogether too soporific conversation, began to circulate once more, and he flushed with pleasure at the thought that he was to see Madame Diane at last.

"May it please Heaven," he said to himself, "that my lady godmother may be a different party from all these gentlemen."



XIX

Jean, in Coming to Anet, had Not Expected All He Found There.

HE page who had come to seek Jean in the garden led him through several halls, in which he found a limited, but honorable, number of servitors, equerries, and guards, each at his appointed post, as at a court ceremony. In the few hours that he had been at Anet, he had already observed that etiquette was rigorously observed here, and that the respect for the mistress of the place was not less great, in every rank of her household, than if King Henri II still lived, and still surrounded her with the splendor of his power.

Besides, everything recalled the memory of the defunct monarch. The halberdiers who stood beside the doors wore the well known monogram, "H.D." on their breasts, and crescents were plentifully sprinkled on the panels of the richly painted or gilded woodwork.

Soon the page lifted a rich damask tapestry, and Jean found himself on the threshold of a vast salon, sumptuously furnished no doubt, crowded with marble statuary and variegated draperies, but in which his eyes,

charmed at first, and then opened wide in deep astonishment, beheld only two persons, Madame Diane, and, seated near her among a group of ladies, Magdelaine de Castillac.

He could not understand how the object of his fervent, if unfaithful, love was thus brought back to him a second time, and for a moment he was so confused that he halted in the doorway, twisting his hat in his hands, and looking from Madame Diane to Magdelaine, who seemed somewhat moved also; and, in short, not advancing at all.

Everyone took this extreme embarrassment for the effect of a shyness and respect, which was not at all displeasing. At a sign from his mistress then, M. de Meurongy came forward, took the young man by the hand, and led him to Madame Diane, whispering to him:

“You must kneel and kiss the hand of your illustrious godmother, if she deigns to give it to you.”

“He takes me for a simpleton,” said Jean to himself, “and, in truth, I am acting like one. Come, come, we shall have plenty of time to think of love, a little later on. First, let us try to get along better.”

The marvelous Duchesse de Valentinois was certainly not young any more, and yet she had retained an incomparable beauty. In company with a few almost divine natures, rarer still than great souls, the favorite of Henri II had the privilege of watching the years roll by without affecting her. One would have said her breast, modeled like that of a girl of twenty, and dazzling

white, had the firmness as well as the splendor of marble, and the delicate curve of her waist had not lost a line of grace and strength. She had the whitest and most dimpled hand in the world; her foot was unequaled in delicacy; her every feature was so definitely perfect as to defy time to alter its contour. Her brow, invested with Olympian calm, was pure, noble, and great, like the brow of an Emperor should be; her mouth was vermilion and delicate. Above all, she had an air of grandeur, of majestic simplicity, and assured power over souls: in a word, she seemed so entirely possessed of the genius of beauty that the surprised and palpitant heart, balancing between admiration and respect, prevented anyone on seeing her from thinking aught but: "Of a truth, this is a goddess!"

She was dressed in black. A white wimple veiled her lovely shoulders; her hair, braided with pearls, was held within a band of black velvet. Madame Diane had never put off this somber attire since the death of her husband, Pierre de Brézé, and she never took it off thereafter.

She held out her hand to the young Gascon cavalier who kneeled before her, looked at him with a sweet gravity, and said to him, in a voice whose enchanting melody penetrated to the depths of Jean's soul:

"You resemble your father very much, my godson, and I congratulate you, for Messire Aurèle-Agrippa is a worthy gentleman. What come you to do at Anet?"

Jean drew the necklace from his breast and, presenting

it to Madame Diane, related in a few words, and with a modesty that was not at all usual to him, the various adventures he had gone through before he could reach Anet. Then he gave his godmother Messire Aurèle-Agrippa's letter, and could not keep from adding, with a glance at Magdelaine out of the corner of his eye:

"My father intended to send me away from our province to take me out of reach of dangers which I have found again elsewhere."

"I know that," answered Madame Diane, "but if I recall what Meurongy has told me, you did not come here by the directest route, nor by the easiest way. You are also, as I can see, a cavalier who has no fear of peril when it is a question of serving the ladies, and you have accomplished M. de Brantôme's errand well; he could not have done better himself. You will stay here for a little time, my godson. I shall talk to you tomorrow when I come out from mass. We shall speak of you and of your future."

At this point M. de Meurongy made a sign to La Tour-Miracle, who had clearly perceived, without this hint, that his audience was at an end. Besides, Madame Diane had turned to one of her ladies, and begun a conversation in a low voice. Jean would have liked very much to approach Magdelaine, and learn from her how she came to be at Anet. This marvelous stroke of fortune astonished him to the last degree. He scarcely knew whether to be sorry or glad for Magdelaine herself. Perhaps M. de Castillac's affairs were going badly at court, and perhaps

Magdelaine, in spite of the protection of the first president's wife, had been unable to do anything to ward off the disgrace which was about to fall on this traitorous gentleman's head. In short, Jean lost himself in suppositions and could not understand how he came to be reunited to the sovereign of his thoughts in such an unexpected manner.

It was a very simple matter, none the less. Madame de Largebaston had made vain efforts to plead the cause of her protégé. The Catholic leaders were as displeased as the Huguenots with a man who had played a double game for a long time, and unceasingly troubled the best-laid plots with his unexpected betrayals. Moreover, it was henceforth inevitable that he should be lost, and poor Magdelaine had been unable to obtain any commutation of the sentence of death pronounced against her father. Her only hope now was in old Castillac's astuteness and cleverness. Warned in time, this worthy had hidden himself, and, intriguing right and left, actively sought to attach himself to someone. The unfortunate part of it was that there was no considerable person whose enmity he had not incurred by some unpardonable offence.

Magdelaine's position had soon become insupportable. The first president's wife, who had much to ask on her own account besides, made her understand the uselessness of anything she might do. She advised her to trust to the times, to chance, which plays such an important rôle, and untangles so many so-called invincible difficulties, and counseled her to return to her province.

But Magdelaine would not hear of returning to her former habitation. Moreover, she had the greatest repugnance to the thought of seeing her father again. She therefore eagerly accepted an invitation to attach herself to Madame Diane's little court.

While we have been giving these details, Jean, provoked because he did not dare speak to Magdelaine, had slowly retreated to the chimney-piece, where he found himself at the side of M. de Vertois.

"Well, sir!" said the latter, in an insinuating tone. "May I ask what impression the sight of our beautiful and adorable mistress has made on you? The most imposing, the most prodigious impression, no doubt? The world is scarcely worthy to kneel before her!"

Jean could not avoid smiling at this exaggerated expression, but he answered in the same tone.

"Sir, Madame Diane seems to me to be one of the wonders of the world."

"She is the greatest, sir."

"She is surely, sir. But one thing about her particularly astonishes me, and that is to see her surround herself with so many beautiful persons. I had always heard it said that beauty sought to enhance itself by the proximity of ugliness. Here, everything is the other way about, and I confess that my lady godmother loses nothing by it."

"Sir," the old gentleman returned, glancing about to see that no one was within hearing, "if it were possible for the sun to have spots, and our mistress defects, I

would tell you that her taste for young and pretty ladies is not altogether reasonable, and that she would do better to surround herself with grey heads, capable of ripening sensible projects."

"There is no lack of grey heads here, sir, for if I except myself, there is not a man in this salon who is less than fifty-five years old at least."

"And in the entire castle, from the gate-keeper to M. de Meurongy, you will not see a younger man. There are pages, in truth, but as soon as they attain the age of fourteen years, they are sent away. Madame Diane does not wish to give the slightest excuse for scandal, and that is one of the wisest things she does. You may be sure, my young cavalier, that she will not keep you near her long."

"So that my godmother sees only old men and young women," said Jean, very curious.

"Oh! As to the old men, she does not see them very much. She receives us for two hours each day. Then, each of us speaks to her at definitely fixed hours, as our service makes it necessary, and the rest of the time, withdrawn in her apartments with that suite of laughing, sporting, young giddyheads, who certainly have not a sensible idea among them, she amuses herself, I know not how. In short, it is really the Goddess Diana surrounded by her nymphs."

As he finished speaking, M. de Meurongy came and took Jean by the arm.

"Madame Diane is asking for you," he said to him.

"What, my godson," said the duchess, "you have

found a lady of your acquaintance here, and you show no eagerness to greet her and speak to her? That is unworthy of such a brave cavalier. But I see by your confused air that you are quite ready to repair your fault. Those ladies will make room for you in their midst."

"The devil," thought Jean, "it is better here than among those sallow-faced politicians."

He sat down beside Magdelaine, and quite naturally they began by telling each other of their different fortunes. Then, when these stories were ended, which was not long, for Jean had his heart set on coming to another subject:

"Dear Magdelaine," the young man said, "I want to tell you that, being more smitten and more in love than ever, I am determined never to leave you until you belong to me by the most sacred bonds. Since you are in my godmother's service, I shall ask her to keep me also, and I shall pursue you, I shall so obsess you with my love, that you will be forced to listen to me."

Magdelaine blushed a little.

"Believe me, Madame Diane has already decided what she wants to do with you," she said. "So your supplications will accomplish nothing. So far as I am concerned, I think it very wicked of you to speak to me still of your love, when you must know I do not respond to it."

"To tell the truth," Jean returned, "that is something I do not know at all. I would have to be an imbecile to be so easily persuaded of your hardness. And then, Mademoiselle, I have not a face to frighten birds; I am gener-

ally of a gay and easy humor; the manor of La Tour-Miracle brings in its good ten thousand livres a year, and I cannot see how you might prefer any of our neighbors to me . . . unless you have met some fine fop in Paris."

"I think you are impertinent, to tell the truth," said Magdelaine, bridling a little, "and besides, why do you persecute me? Never will your father the baron consent to an alliance with my family. He has always detested M. de Castillac. See what a rôle I should be playing were I to welcome your protestations! Do not pursue me any more, and while you are at Anet, consider me only a former acquaintance, for whom you have no very marked preference."

"You treat me harshly," answered La Tour-Miracle, with a certain ill-humor, "and I confess that since that is the case, you shall be obeyed on every point. There is, somewhere in the world, someone whose eyes are as beautiful as another's, and whom I can love when I desire."

"Do not be backward about it, sir."

"I shall not be backward, you may be sure, and the affair is already well launched."

"Then why did you come to languish by me? You have always been of an unexampled duplicity! And may one know the name of this beautiful lady whom you love? "

"With all my heart. She is called Corisande, and there is no one on earth to compare with her. I have had the

honor to tell her so myself several times, and she suffered this boldness."

"I am as kindly disposed toward her as can be," Magdelaine answered, "since she is ridding me of entreaties which did not please me, and if I ever meet her, I shall thank her for it."

"And that," cried Jean, "is the end and recompense of such long-standing affection! What, Magdelaine, do you not feel your heart rebelling against such barbarity? Does nothing tell you that it is vexation that makes me speak so, and that my soul, wholly depicted in my eyes, gives me the lie? Ah, dear, dear Magdelaine, if I have hurt you, forgive me!"

"I have nothing to forgive you. You have not betrayed me, since I promised you nothing. You are free: act freely; nothing binds you, nothing ties you to me. I would blush to become the wife of an honest gentleman who perhaps, some day, would think he had the right to reproach me with faults I have not committed. If that should happen," Magdelaine continued, with tears in her voice, "I should die in despair. Were it not better that I should repulse ideas and projects which can never be realized? Keep on your way, in honor and courage, and think no more of me. Do not remember the childish things that are past. Henceforth may I be nothing, nothing, to you! That, I swear to you, is my firm desire, and nothing shall alter it."

"Here in truth is vain imagining!" answered Jean, who was in love, and very obstinate besides. "Because

old Castillac has played some rather witty tricks on a few captains, we cannot marry? But you are romancing, dear Magdelaine! ”

“ A sad romance, in any case, and since we are on the subject, be convinced that there were lesser obstacles to the union of Pontalipée of the Green Sleeve with the Knight of the Flaming Sword, than there are to our marriage.”

“ I shall never understand,” Jean went on, “ why there should be so much fuss about a Gascon gentleman, who has some property under the sun, wedding his neighbor. It is something that is seen every day, and oftener twice than once. You will say to me that our two fathers do not love each other? I have been sent out of the country that I might forget you? All that is pure jest, and no one will ever get anywhere in the world by allowing himself to be swayed by such bagatelles. Besides, I know that you cannot very well agree to the truth of all I say. The conventions of your sex make it your duty to treat me as harshly as possible until your father and mine shall have put an end to their quarrels. I only ask you, therefore, to show me, by a look, a gesture, that you will not be impossible to move when the time comes.”

We cannot tell what answer Magdelaine was about to make, for at that moment there was a general stir throughout the salon; everyone was rising; she herself rose, and Jean, obliged to imitate her, showed a very ill-humor, as may readily be believed; but things rarely go to suit the pleasure of lovers.

Madame Diane was standing, and greeting the gentlemen as they left the salon. The ladies had grouped themselves about their mistress.

The bows ended, Madame Diane withdrew, followed by her charming troop, and the courtiers thought of dispersing, each to occupy himself according to his humor.

M. de Beaugeois and M. de Meurongy each took Jean by the hand, inviting him to their respective apartments.

"Come, my young friend," Beaugeois said, "I am eager to become better acquainted with you!"

"You overwhelm me, sir," Jean answered with a deep bow.

"Come, come," said Meurongy, pulling on that side, "my illustrious mistress has ordered me to see to it that you are amused, and I do not wish to lose sight of you."

"I am very much embarrassed to choose between you, gentlemen; but allow me to point out that I see M. de Cessé down there in the courtyard, mounting on horseback. It is probably to take a little ride."

"To ride and hunt," Beaugeois answered. "The poor fellow is incapable of anything better, and has never in his life been able to understand a serious idea."

"Well, I confess to my shame that I should be delighted to look over the environs of the castle a little, if you see no inconvenience in it."

"None," said Beaugeois; "but I would have been very pleased to make you acquainted with a great many little things, which you will regret, later, that you do not know."

“ In truth, for the moment, I must beg you to excuse me! M. de Cessé! M. de Cessé! Pray wait for me, I am going with you! ”

A groom brought La Tour-Miracle a stout Norman horse, and in a few minutes Jean found himself in the forest, side by side with M. de Cessé, who did not confide any political matters to him, since he did not occupy himself with such things. Jean admired the beauties of the park, and particularly the great number of stags and fallow deer that were to be seen in the clearings, grazing, or lying at rest in the fine grass. The graceful animals did not run at the horsemen’s approach, and one of them even came so close that Jean saw that he had a silver collar about his neck, with the words: *Dianae me vovit Henricus*, engraved upon it.

“ There are more than fifty or sixty of those useless animals here,” said M. de Cessé, “ and Madame Diane would see us dead without a frown, rather than a single one of these animals. But do not despair, the forest has enough wherewith to console us, as you will see before long.”



XX

Jean Amuses Himself as Never Before in His Life.

NEXT morning very early Jean was sleeping soundly in the sumptuous bed into which he had plunged delightedly the night before, when he heard the door of his room open.

He raised himself on his elbow, his mind still wrapped in sleep, and saw a huntsman with a lantern in his hand come in and set about lighting the torches.

"Dress yourself quickly, sir," the groom said. "You are to follow Madame Diane to the hunt."

"Ah! Ah!" said Jean, jumping out of bed. "I am delighted. It is more than a month since I have followed any game at all, and when I started my last hare, I did not expect to begin again in such fine company."

"We are going to hunt the stag, sir," said the groom, as he helped Jean to tie his doublet and pull on his boots.

"The stag? So much the better! I am ready, and I shall go and await the ladies."

"They must have been in the courtyard these last five minutes now," the groom answered, "if they are as prompt as usual. Madame Diane is always ready before the time she has appointed."

"Great gods!" cried Jean, running down the stairs. "Have I had the misfortune to keep my lady godmother waiting?"

He did, in fact, find Madame Diane, already mounted, in the courtyard. The day was scarcely dawning, pale and misty, and the servants held some lighted lanterns. Madame Diane was dressed in black, as usual, with a black riding-habit, and a black hat crowned with a plume of the same color. As on the previous day, her calm, serene face, though it was unsmiling, seemed to inspire in those around her a joy in which she took delight.

All the ladies were gathered there, several of them on horseback, others accepting the aid of equerries in mounting. Others were half asleep, but laughing at themselves, and accepting the unpleasantness in patience. Magdelaine was among these less robust huntresses.

"Do you still think as you did yesterday?" Jean asked her in a low voice.

"Always," she answered, turning away, but squeezing his hand.

The old gentlemen were running up one after the other. At last, when everyone was ready, when the sun, victorious over the morning mists, showed itself in a pure and brilliant sky, Madame Diane gave the signal, and off they went.

Among the horsemen, only Jean was agile enough to keep up with the beautiful huntresses. He held himself two paces from his godmother, having too much good

sense to seek to pass her, and doubtful, besides, as to whether he could if he would. Sometimes, in crossing a clearing, the alert troop perceived one of the worthy gentlemen all out of breath and trying his best to catch up with them, but, alas, never doing so. They laughed; but as the stag appeared in the distance, with the pack on his heels, no one thought of them for very long.

Finally, the halting beast, dead weary, having crossed two ponds, fell on a green knoll beneath a knotted oak that spread great branches here and there as though to protect the son of the forests. It was a spot better suited for love than for the dealing of death, even to a stag. The exhausted animal shed those supreme tears which have been so often pitied. He lay on his flank, the dogs barking around him. Two huntsmen jumped to the ground, drawing their knives. The others sounded out the death.

Madame Diane galloped up and stopped her horse short before the stag. She took off her glove and passed her hand over her beautiful hair which had been loosened by the swiftness of her course.

"That was a fine hunt," she said. "I am glad. Now, my godson, show us what you can do."

Without answering, Jean, flushing with pleasure, jumped down from his horse, and, drawing his knife, stood before the stag. Then, at the moment when the unfortunate animal gathered his strength to strike him sideways with his antlers, he jumped to one side and plunged his weapon to the hilt in the victim's throat. The stag

fell, and the joyous dogs precipitated themselves upon him. Jean had some difficulty in keeping them back. With one stroke of his weapon, he cut off one of the stag's feet and came to present it to Madame Diana, on his knees.

"Thank you, my godson," said she, "take this mark of your respect to Mademoiselle de Castillac, who will accept it in my name."

Jean's joy overflowed, and he narrowly avoided manifesting it aloud. So Madame Diane approved and protected his love? That was a victory and a happy augury. In vain Magdelaine received his present in the coldest manner; he lost not a whit of his gaiety.

"You shall have to submit some day, my beautiful damsel," said our hero.

But it was no time to argue. The old gentlemen were arriving one after the other, and, with uncovered heads, lost themselves in compliments on the good fortune which followed their mistress everywhere.

"May you, madam, believe an old and faithful servitor," cried M. de Meurongy, "and soon try out your destiny in more important games."

Madame Diane made a sign with her head which might have been taken for an expression of thanks, and turned to her ladies.

"It is time to return to the castle," she said. "My godson, you will not forget that I shall receive you at noon."

Jean was careful not to do so, and by eleven he was in

the waiting room. When the time had come for his audience, two pages in splendid livery fetched him into the Duchess' chamber.

Madame Diane was lying on her bed, and beside her sat one of her favorites, a book emblazoned with armorial bearings in her hand. At a sign from her mistress, the reader became silent, rose, went out, and left the young man, somewhat intimidated, alone with the Duchess.

"Come here, my godson, and listen carefully to what I have to say to you. You have no doubt already heard discussion of all the projects formed by my gentlemen to give me back the power I one time exercised. Let it be sufficient for you to know that such imaginations of clumsy zeal would displease me in a young man like yourself. Be complaisant to my old friends, but do not attempt to give those dreams reality. You understand me, do you not?"

"Madam, I shall obey you in all things, as is my duty," Jean answered submissively.

"Now, my godson, you must not nurse the hope of staying long at Anet. You shall spend eight days here, no more; this is not the place for a good soldier like yourself."

Jean bowed, but this announcement was not sufficiently to his taste to inspire him to such frank protestation of his obedience.

"Then," Madame Diane continued, "after the eight days have passed, you will leave with letters from me to persons at court who will serve you. Understand me well,

I want you to make a fortune worthy of your birth and your good appearance. I know you have an affection close to your heart; to hide nothing from you, I think like Mademoiselle de Castillac that present circumstances are not favorable to your project. Old Castillac, unless he is very clever at hiding himself, runs great risk of ending his life at the hands of justice, and in that case, you cannot stain your name by an alliance with such a man. I hope, however, that everything will go better than we think today, and then I will help you. And so be gay, my godson, and employ the eight days you will spend here well, for your own pleasure. I also shall think of your amusement."

Having spoken thus, Madame Diane gave him her hand. He put one knee to the floor and kissed that hand with gratitude. Then he left her and went off into the courtyard to dream.

All that the Duchess had said to him pleased him mightily, except that he could not stay at Anet more than eight days. He was very comfortable in the castle. He was close to Magdelaine. He enjoyed unbounded liberty. He was spoiled by all the old gentlemen, who welcomed in him their mistress' favored godson. In short, there was nothing to call him elsewhere. Of adventures, though he did not dislike them, he had experienced enough latterly to find pleasure now in repose, and the prospect of an indefinite sojourn in this fairy place would not have frightened him. But after all, Madame Diane had spoken, and he must resign himself. Jean was not

the man to be made desolate by a vexation, and all the evils in the world, or almost all, reduced themselves to vexations for him. He regained his good humor, therefore, after a little reflection, and seeing himself in paradise for eight days, resolved to make himself happy enough for fifteen.

The day passed as had the previous one. In the castle of Anet, everything seemed calculated to promote well-being and inspire to gaiety. But it was a regular well-being, and a tranquil, contained gaiety, like that of the chatelaine. It was the voluptuousness of the Epicurean who has withdrawn from vanities, noise, and disorder, and who invites himself to savor in profound serenity what nature and art may offer that is exquisite to tastes that are too knowing and too delicate to be unbridled. Jean's extreme youth prevented him from completely understanding the wisdom of this ordinance; it is even possible that this sort of life, if prolonged, would have bored him in the end; the fact remains that he liked it marvelously well, the second day, and that he came away from the gathering, where he had once more seen Diane surrounded by her court, dazzled, and delighted by the wit of his godmother's ladies, and by her own manner of expressing precise and delicate thoughts at every moment.

Evening came, and Jean had made arrangements for a passage of arms with M. de Cessé, who decidedly suited him better than all the other grave personages who were in the castle. He had already taken up the foils, and was

listening to the somewhat verbose development of a theory of Italian fencing, all the secrets of which M. de Cessé was striving to impart to our hero in a few lessons, when two men-servants came to find Jean to take him, they said, to Madame Diane's supper.

"The devil, the devil, my dear child," said M. de Cessé. "This is worth more than fencing, and I envy your fate. Your illustrious godmother is at this moment granting you a very rare favor. Follow these two worthy fellows promptly, and tomorrow morning you shall tell me how you amused yourself."

"Certainly," said Jean. "I am burning with pleasure and curiosity. So we shall put off our match until the morrow."

"We are going to dress you," said the two men-servants.

"Nothing could be better," M. de Cessé added. "The toilette is one of the most important points here for all young people. Goodbye, La Tour-Miracle, and once again, have a good time."

The two domestics took Jean off, but not to his room. He was led through a part of the castle in which he had never been before, and at the end of a darksome corridor a little oaken door opened of itself before the cavalier.

"Enter, sir," said the men-servants. "We shall not follow you farther."

He entered, and the door closed behind him. Coming out of the darkness, the brilliant light that illuminated this place dazzled him at first. It was shed by a gilded

lustre that hung from the ceiling, and bore pyramids of scented tapers. The room was square, and small enough. The walls, lined with marble two thirds of their height, reflected the light which poured on their polished surfaces in warm rays. Above the marble, a series of paintings from mythology extended all around the room. These represented Diana at the bath, surrounded by her nymphs; Actæon turned into a stag; Callisto metamorphosed into a bear, and many other subjects besides. The ceiling was also painted, and by a skilful hand, showing the heavens illuminated by the light of Phœbe, followed by the choir of celestial bodies. If Jean had been more of a connoisseur of pictures than it is suitable for a Gascon gentleman to be, he would have immediately recognized the touch of the most skilful of the Italian masters. At least he knew enough to recognize how precious these pictures were.

The floor was paved with marble in various colors, malachite and porphyry, arranged in arabesques. In the middle of the room a square basin was filling with warm water, which two salamanders of gilded bronze, writhing on its brink, spurted from their mouths, while in the corners of the room fine silver censers spread intoxicating perfumes in loose white clouds.

Jean was occupied in the contemplation of these marvels when a portière of red taffeta which faced the door through which he had entered was raised, and two thick-lipped and very ugly negroes, clothed in green tunics and wearing on their arms, legs and necks bracelets and col-

lars of gold, appeared, bowed to him, and slowly took off his clothes.

If he had not meddled in it himself, the two blacks would have taken a long time to finish this operation, which they performed while singing, or rather chanting in a low voice, a sort of barbaric melopœia, which could not be less negroid than themselves. At last, thanks to Jean's vivacity, the operation was ended, and the young man entered the bath.

Whether it was that the perfumed vapors which spread about the room intoxicated him, or that the water which filled the basin was endowed with mysterious virtues, La Tour-Miracle soon felt a sort of voluptuous languor stealing over all his members of a sort to which he was not at all used, to such effect that when he came out of the bath, he let the two negroes chant their song at their leisure, and cover him with a muslin robe after having dried him as slowly as they wished.

Then the two gnomes led him out by the door through which they had entered, and put him into the hands of two negroes as handsome as the others had been ugly. These new servants were tall and well-built, their features were fine and regular, their hair silky; they were Abyssinians.

They introduced Jean into a room larger than the first. Venetian glasses in their gilded frames were everywhere. Along the walls, which were covered with Cordova leather, were rich chests filled with clothes of every form and color. On white marble dressing-tables were a

multitude of toilet articles, and velvet jewel-cases into which precious stones were poured.

"Choose the costume that suits you best from these chests," said one of the Abyssinians. "It is your mistress and ours who permits it."

"I will leave you to dress me as you please," Jean answered. "Besides, I do not know any too well what I am doing and what I want."

Without answering, the slaves began La Tour-Miracle's toilet. They perfumed his long, silky hair, his downy beard and fine moustache. Thanks to their secrets, they made veritable women's hands of his which were well-formed, but tanned and rough from handling weapons. Then, they put on him a pair of wide pantaloons, the color of carnations, and stitched with silver; a shirt of Indian muslin bordered with flowers of a thousand shades, and then a brocaded vest. Over that a wide robe of motley colors, such as are produced at Damascus: a precious stuff, sold by the Venetians for its weight in gold. A rich belt held this robe about his waist.

"You are ready," said one of the Abyssinians. "Look at yourself, my lord."

Jean looked at himself in the mirror, and found his appearance not at all bad. He looked a trifle more like a heathen than a good Christian gentleman; but altogether, he felt quite satisfied.

The Abyssinians retired. When the cavalier found himself alone, he felt something like a shiver of fear, such as initiates to the mysteries must feel while waiting for

the solemn moment. His head was in a whirl. He found himself in a magic world, to which his imagination had never before wandered. Involuntarily, he sat down on some cushions, with palpitating heart.

At that moment, a secret door opened in the wall two steps from where he sat, and a smiling young woman, crowned with flowers, appeared on the sill.

“Take this crown I give you and follow me,” she said in a sweet, musical voice.

Jean rose, took the crown, and believing himself in a dream, docilely followed his lovely guide.



XXI

Jean Continues to Enjoy Himself; but this Happy Life is Very Promptly Interrupted.

HE rooms through which Jean now passed with his guide were as completely strange to him as those in which his toilet, which might rather be called a transformation, had been performed. For the life of him he could never have imagined that splendor and magnificence could attain the degree to which he saw them carried in these sumptuous apartments. Sometimes great stairways rose before his astonished eyes, and multiplied as they ascended between two rows of Corinthian pillars, lighted by the thousands of girandoles and lusters which hung from the high ceiling; then he would traverse balconies that overhung the halls, and in which daylight supplied the illumination, and look down into their depths without being able to perceive where they might end. The floor was everywhere covered with parquetry of precious woods and resplendent mosaics, until they came to a last corridor, where the sound of their footsteps was suddenly muffled by a thick carpet. At the same moment, Jean heard the sound of musical instruments. He understood that he had come to

the end of his mysterious journey, and his guide, showing him a great golden door, signed to him to push it open.

He obeyed, and found himself in a room that was only moderately large, but even more delicately ornamented than the great salons whose marvels he had just been admiring. All the panels were covered with most exquisite paintings, separated by gilded woodwork. Great candelabras were disposed at regular intervals throughout the room, and statues, marvels of ancient art, alternated with brilliant products of the Florentine chisel. At the end of the hall, on a dais faced with porphyry and upheld by caryatids in the form of Amazonian slaves, an orchestra of black women, each with a stringed instrument of some sort, or a flute, were playing an air, the prelude to which Jean had heard in the distance.

A table laid with damascene linen embroidered in purple was at the foot of the balcony, opposite the orchestra, and so left a considerable open space. It would be useless to enumerate all the dishes, the fruits, the flowers, the exquisite wines, with which this table was loaded. It would likewise be useless to count the gilded silver platters, the silver ewers, or the cups—chiseled, encrusted with jewels, and of every shape. It would be better worth while to stop a moment to admire the tall, well-formed, engaging, and beautiful young ladies who, in servile but rich and many-colored dress, with flowers in their hair, stood around the apartment, ready to receive and to serve the illustrious company which soon ap-

peared. Jean had just entered the hall when the wide curtains of a portière were suddenly drawn aside, and Madame Diane appeared, surrounded by her ladies.

The latter were attired in various fantastic manners; but Madame Diane as always wore her black velvet dress and white linen stomacher. On that evening, as doubtless on other evenings also, the always beautiful woman seemed of an unequaled majesty of beauty.

"Sit down beside me, my godson," she said to Jean, "and be gay, as one must needs be at supper, when all the annoyances of the day are finished, and there is a whole night to be passed before tomorrow's thorns must be met. Sit down, my ladies, and we shall soon see if Cléonice has succeeded in producing the *divertissement* she promised us."

Madame Diane spoke these words with the smiling eyes which made her so charming, and the grave lips which made her seem like one of the immortals. All the ladies and Jean sat down to the table as their mistress ordered, and the conversation lagged for a moment, but for good reason. The lovely huntresses had galloped through the forests in the morning, breathing in the brisk air, and no doubt could not have the detachment from earthly things that is so dear to modern beauties who, leaving their bodies on their sofas, let their souls wander all day in immaterial regions. Such was not the case with our beauties: we are obliged to admit that all these emulators of the dryads, charming as they were, had good appetites none the less.

From all sides the clatter of forks was heard, and the soft murmur of wine, poured in purple or golden floods by the round-armed attendants. After a few moments, however, the jesting and teasing began.

"See, madam," one of the ladies cried, "how wisely you have had Magdelaine placed far from the Seigneur your godson. Instead of displaying the charm of his wit, as he will no doubt not fail to do, he would have sought the delights of a tête-à-tête first of all — which would have been very mortifying for us all."

"I should not have allowed it, madam," cried Magdelaine, blushing, "and I do not know why M. de la Tour-Miracle insists on calling himself my servitor."

"Shall we escape from a tête-à-tête only to fall into a quarrel?" said Madame Diane. "I pray you, my beauties, if there must be talk of love, let it at least be that of outsiders."

"Madam," said a pretty, sprightly, and blonde person with violets and vine-leaves in her hair, "no one is more than nibbling at their marchpane any more, or sipping at their wine. Would it not be proper to occupy everyone, even the lovers, with other pleasures than those of the table?"

"As you please, Myrto," Madame Diane answered. "Decide what will have to be done. Do you wish the table to be taken away?"

"Oh no madam," cried Cléonice, "those who are not hungry now may be so later, even Monsieur your godson, who has finally determined to ask for wine."

“ Well, Myrto! What are we going to do? ” cried several voices altogether.

“ In the first place,” said Myrto, “ you know that we must first wait for the silver platter, the wine, and the milk.”

At these words, the ladies were silent, and looked serious. Two attendants who had just entered the hall gave Myrto the things she had just mentioned, and Myrto, turning to Madame Diane, and inclining her head to her respectfully, slowly spoke these words:

“ Madam, remember King Henri II! ”

Then she sprinkled a few drops of wine and water on the silver platter, as a libation, returned it to the attendants, and sat down again.

When this mournful memory was invoked, Jean felt a dread creeping into his heart. He was apprehensive for a moment, lest this return to such sad thoughts should cast a shadow like a widow’s veil over everyone seated at the supper-table, and he could not keep himself from looking at his godmother.

Madame Diane had responded to Myrto’s words with a nod of the head, and a few words, spoken too low to be heard, but which seemed to mean that the memory of her royal lover never left her heart.

After a moment of silence, she said, in her ordinary voice:

“ Come, Myrto, what have you thought up? For this morning you were tormenting Cléonice about the task you would have to impose on her this evening.”

"Oh, madam, it is not Cléonice whom I want to embarrass the most, but Flaminie. So I have decided that the first shall tell a story, and that the second, using the same personages, all having the same characters, shall make another quite different story, with an altogether different conclusion."

"Myrto's ideas are always like that," cried Cléonice and Flaminie.

"But it does not matter," Cléonice continued. "If Flaminie accepts, I also accept. The Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle shall judge of how we acquit ourselves."

"Shall I be judge? Willingly!" said Jean, who was becoming more bold. "I know no better trade. One reproves and one approves, and one does not need to show that one can do better than what one disparages. But, to take up my functions from the start, does it not seem to you, ladies, that Madame Myrto, who is trying to embarrass others here, should also run some similar risk?"

"Certainly, certainly!" the ladies cried. "There is an excellent judgment!"

"Who refuses?" Myrto asked, with a wilful air.

"With the permission of my godmother and yourself, I desire that, if the two stories that are told please everyone, you should be held to invent another divertissement in which you shall yourself take the principal part."

This idea, which seemed to promise amusement, was applauded, and Jean was congratulated on having committed himself so little.

"I must guard my character as a judge carefully," said he. "That is to say, I must do nothing. That is the only way to avoid failure, and to be always respectable."

"Really," said Madame Diane, "I have a godson who has as much of a vocation to become a doctor as a captain. Let us hear Cléonice's story."

Cléonice immediately began her recital, without waiting to be coaxed. It was a clownish, fantastic, impossible fable, to which she gave the title of "Story of the Prudish Bitch and the Tricolor Poodle." Everything about the story: the timbre of her voice, the varied inflections of her speech, her look, her gestures, increased the interest of the recital. She played it as much as she told it. Cléonice was vigorously applauded, and Madame Diane declared her story was one of the best she had ever heard.

As to the godson, he was delighted. He had laughed more than anyone, and sooner than anyone. Now he begged Flaminie to enter the lists in her turn, keeping faithfully to the conditions which had been imposed.

"I assure you, madam," he said to her, "that I have no small opinion of the wit that sparkles in your eyes. But I confess that the perfection of the story we have just heard seems to me difficult to equal."

"It is pretty, I don't deny it. But still, Cléonice has told us better. What would you have said if you had heard, as we did, the story of the 'Gentleman Fox,' that of 'Abaïdha's Fiancé,' the one about the 'Mannequin,' and many others? But I shall do my best not to merit

your reproaches in compromising my vanity. Listen well. The title of my story is: 'The Catalonian Bladder.' "

Here Flaminie, in a discreet voice, and with the air of a cat threading its way among glasses, began her narration. She did not let herself be carried away by her verse, as Cléonice had done. She foresaw effects, and cunningly sought to bring them out; she guided her audience through a multitude of details, somewhat piled up, perhaps, but all delightful. What better could be asked? The story pleased everyone very well, and the narrator was thanked, not only for having told it, but for having ended it.

"You do not know," said Myrto to La Tour-Miracle, "that our companion often indulges a sad mania for not finishing her stories. There have been some of her stories of which we never knew the ending until three years after we had heard the beginning."

"That was a pity, no doubt," answered Jean, "but you, madam, who are speaking to me, are you going to forget that it is your turn to amuse us? I hope you will not complain of the justice of my demand? "

"I am not even tempted to do so," Myrto returned, "you shall be satisfied. Let Barberine, Claire, Léontie, and Lise come with me. In a few seconds we shall let you know what we shall do."

The four ladies rose and followed Myrto out of the hall through a door under the dais.

"Leave the pleasure of surprise to my godson," said Madame Diane; "and while our beauties are thinking

how best to display their wit, will you, Furia, make their absence seem the shorter by singing us some romance? ”

“ Willingly, madam,” answered Furia. “ The musicians must accompany me, and I shall sing you a song I know well, from having often sung it, which relates the despair of a poor Roman lord, whom an inhuman priestess is about to sacrifice to her false gods.”

Furia was a tall person, whose appearance did not promise much fire. She appeared cold, and difficult to move. Nevertheless, from the first notes that issued from her throat, she imparted to all her hearers the animation she did not herself possess. The vibration of her notes was as powerful as their sweetness was tender, and it would not have taken much more to bring tears to the eyes of several of those who listened. Fortunately, this emotion did not last. To be good and sweet, on a holiday, emotion must not last too long. Myrto had come back into the hall, and, after joining in the applause, she gravely advanced to the center of the vacant space between the table and the musicians’ dais.

“ Ladies, we have agreed to present to you a comedy entitled ‘ Sometimes Love Mistakes.’ We only ask that Livie, who is sitting lazily over there with her head resting on her hands, should help us with her good taste in the matter of choosing our costumes.”

“ Go with Myrto, Livie,” said Madame Diane; “ careless as you usually are, it is fitting that you also should serve in the interest of the communal pleasures.”

When the play began, La Tour-Miracle reflected that

these were no novices at the comedian's art, though play-acting were not their profession. Myrto put as much art and reserve into her acting as Flaminie had brought to the recital of her fable, and it was not possible to believe that she produced a single impression on her audience which she had not plotted. Barberine did not care so much for science; but nature had done well by her: she was comic in her gravity, and pleased her audience well. Claire was particularly apt at comedy. Nevertheless, all the ladies declared that instead of a play that was obviously learned by heart, for Léontie did not know her rôle, they would have preferred one of those pieces such as were played in Italy, and called "a l'improviso."

"Faith, ladies," cried Jean in his turn, "I think you are very difficult to please. It is possible that, used to these pleasures as you are, you think less of them. But as for me, who have never seen anything like it in my life, I assure you I ask for no more, and I feel as though I were in the antechamber of Paradise."

"We will end the evening on that compliment," said Madame Diane. "It is late, and all these ladies, so wakeful now, will have great difficulty in leaving their beds at break of day to follow me to the hunt. Goodbye, then, my godson. Kiss Magdelaine's hand, if she permits it, and leave us."

Jean kissed Magdelaine's hand. As to going away, he would have made some difficulty about that, had he dared. He prolonged his farewells to everyone as long as he could. But at last, warned by the look of the woman

who had brought him that the Duchess must not be obliged to repeat her orders, he allowed himself to be led from the hall.

When the doors were closed behind him, he found himself in deepest darkness. But his guides walked with an assured step, and, each holding him by one hand, did not let him dally. At last, without knowing through what passages he had passed, he found himself in his room, between the two black Abyssinian slaves, who took off his rich costume, put him to bed, and went away.

As soon as he found himself alone, his thoughts, still full of wonderment, naturally tried to collect themselves. Despite the beauty of all the ladies, his heart had not strayed from Magdelaine for a single moment. This unusual seriousness was well worth the compliments with which he eagerly plied himself. But at the same time, he agreed that Magdelaine's beauty, so dear to his soul, did not equal his godmother's.

At this feast, where all richness and all prodigality had poured out their magnificence, where all seemed to succeed in heightening the splendor of all the women, making them more divine; at this feast where wit and charm had opened up their treasures and imitated happiness as closely as possible, Madame Diane had appeared to La Tour-Miracle as imparting joy and felicity, as feeling it herself. But in a different manner from those weak creatures on whom she lavished these charming gifts of her power. She had seemed rather calm than rejoiced, rather happy than amused; hers was an Olympian na-

ture, and one might have said that, mysterious as Isis, she still kept for herself, as she lavished joy, pleasures that were too pure and too great for the weakness of the mortals with whom she was surrounded.

While he reflected thus, Jean felt sleep overpowering him, and then the images of Cléonice, Myrto, Claire, the beautiful comédiennes, Furia the lovely singer, and Magdelaine became confused before his eyes. He felt himself dragged into a magic circle, and heard the chords of the feminine orchestra re-echoing in his ears. Then he went to sleep.

He had been sleeping about an hour, in that unquiet and agitated condition that follows a feast, when he was wakened with a start by a rattle of musketry.

He sat up quickly and gave ear. For a moment, he thought himself the plaything of a dream. But new detonations, amongst which his ear easily recognized the roar of a culverin, made him jump out of bed and run to his window, which gave on the great courtyard.

There he saw the castle soldiers running up from every side, most of them only half dressed, like people surprised in their sleep, and on the platform of the towers that guarded the draw-bridge, he clearly saw a large group, still firing their arquebuses at their enemies who were, no doubt, on the other side of the wall.

He hastened to throw on a few clothes, seized his sword, opened the door, and went down the stairs, four steps at a time, to reach the scene of the combat.



XXII

Jean Makes Some Very Serious Resolutions, for Which He Does Not Think He Will Ever Have Occasion to Applaud Himself.

 JEAN quickly reached the door of one of the towers, and, in company with several gentlemen who like himself were running up wondering whence this attack might come, he was about to go out when M. de Cessé, who, on account of his rank as commandant, took precedence of them, arrived, and led them to the platform. There they found a dozen arquebusiers very busy and very warm, reloading their arms, while a big sergeant spoke to them in a paternal tone.

“All right, my children, aim well; do not be too hasty. Powder is a commodity that has its value like all others, and which an economical and God-fearing soldier does not like to waste.”

“For God, Roulebedaine,” cried M. de Cessé, “whence comes all this noise?”

“Sir,” the brave sergeant answered, “do you not see something stirring there, in the shadow of the woods?”

Over there, about two hundred paces away, at the end of my finger? ”

“ I see it. What is it? ”

“ Sir, it is a troop of men at arms, who came here demanding admittance to the castle, saying there was someone here whom they had to arrest. Comtois called me. I told these cavaliers to wait for daylight and Madame Diane’s good pleasure. But they answered me with abuse. They attempted to enter regardless, and fired on me. I believed, sir, that it was in conformity to all good usage to stand firm, and at my orders the post answered with a fire which must have felled a few men, for they suddenly retired into that corner over there, where they are almost hidden by the darkness.”

“ Very well, Roulebedaine, my friend,” said M. de Cessé. “ But here are these fellows returning to the attack, or at least I see one of them advancing to the entrance of the castle.”

“ You are right,” said Jean, “ and what is more, this horseman displays a white handkerchief, a proof that he is no longer disquieted by Sergeant Roulebedaine’s courtesies.”

Everyone was silent, ardently desirous of knowing what these nocturnal assailants wanted, and the man who bore the flag of truce, having reached the edge of the moat, spoke thus:

“ Gentlemen, in the King’s name, we come to claim a horrible assassin, heretic and parricide, deserving of the most horrible death, who has hidden himself among you,

If you do not give him up, you expose yourselves to the consequences of rebellion, and we will only wait a few hours for reinforcements and cannon which will enable us to enter in spite of you! ”

“ Sir,” answered Captain Cessé, “ you speak to us of a gallows-bird, and we are not in a den. Seek your man elsewhere, he is not here. In any case, you come with violence by night, calling yourself an officer of the King. We are permitted to doubt it, and until there is proof to the contrary, judging you by your acts, I take you for a brigand, and I assure you that you shall not enter.”

“ I will enter,” cried the officer, “ and my captain will treat you all as traitors. But to do things formally, I summon you a last time to put into my hands without delay one named Jean de la Tour-Miracle, who is accused of murdering the great M. de Guise, lieutenant-general of this kingdom! ”

At this declaration, which could not have been more unexpected, Captain Cessé, the gentlemen, the soldiers, and Jean particularly, were confounded.

“ What? ” cried the most interested of them. “ You dare to say, wretch, that I have committed such a black deed? Noble or churl, you shall answer for it! ”

“ Ah! Ah! Are you up there, my fine rascal? ” the bearer of the white flag answered. “ Come down as soon as possible. You shall bawl out your bravado before a court of justice.”

“ Eh! What? M. de Guise has been murdered? ” some

of those present cried at last, recovering from their surprise. "Is it really true?"

"You know it better than I," returned the officer. "Come, let us have it over. Deliver La Tour-Miracle to me. It is high time he were disemboweled, racked on the wheel, and his four limbs cut off!"

"Thank you," murmured Sergeant Roulebedaine. "If anyone proposed as much to me, I should not be eager to go."

M. de Cessé had reflected a moment. This business was very bad. The accusation seemed so precise that it must repose on some basis. But on the other hand, to deliver his mistress' godson to people who might be his personal enemies was to incur too great a responsibility, and he did not believe that Madame Diane would ever pardon him if he did so. He leaned over the battlement and said:

"Sir, if you are an officer of the King, and charged with the important errand you have mentioned, you will easily be patient until noon. As for me, who have the honor to command in this castle, I declare to you that you shall neither enter peaceably nor by force before then, and I further invite you to withdraw your people from within range of our culverins."

"Sir," cried the officer in a furious voice, "it is high treason, and you shall weep all the tears in your body for it!"

"Get out," answered Cessé. "Your conversation does not please me."

The bearer of the white flag went off at a gallop. His troop was seen to form and disappear in the woods. So far as could be judged in the darkness, there were a good sixty horsemen at least.

Meanwhile, the greatest emotion reigned among the gentlemen. The death of M. de Guise was an event of such great import to the whole kingdom that, though strangers to the fortunes of the Lorraine princes, the servitors of Madame Diane — most of them, as we have seen, full of political plans and hopes — saw a thousand reasons for reflection in it. The singular fashion in which they learned of this death gave no less matter for thought.

“I see quite well,” exclaimed Jean, “that my infamous Méré must have committed some great crime, and that Barbillon did not arrive in time. But I am persuaded, gentlemen, that you do not doubt my innocence?”

“I am certain of it, in fact,” answered M. de Cessé; “but my opinion does not affect your affair, and if M. de Guise has really been assassinated, the judges will be more avid to hang and rack to right and left than to find people innocent. I can therefore offer you but weak felicitations for your virtue, but very strong congratulations on having the good strong walls of the castle of Anet to protect you. But we have other things to do, besides gossiping. All the Catholic garrisons round-about are going to fall upon us, and we must be ready to receive them. I am going to tend to it, and

you, Beugeois, go and inform Madame Diane of what is occurring."

Having spoken thus, Captain Cessé, recapturing, in spite of his gray hair, a quite youthful ardor, and rejoicing to have once more before he died an opportunity of showing what he could do, hastened to take the necessary dispositions for the defence of the place confided to his care.

He had all available provisions brought in from the surrounding villages, assembled the lustier of the peasants and gave orders that arms should be distributed to them. He appointed some of his oldest soldiers to command them, and parties of cavalry were sent out from the castle to watch the roads, and give warning of the enemy's approach. In short, Captain Cessé showed he was in truth a man of war.

In less than two hours, Anet had become a fortress in the most complete sense. The courtyard was filled with carts bringing in wheat, provisions of all sorts, herds of sheep and oxen, armed peasants, soldiers. There was agitation and tumult everywhere, for Madame Diane was adored by her vassals.

Meanwhile, Beugeois had gone before his mistress and told her all he knew. Magdelaine, who was present at this interview, scarcely even sought to hide her great anxiety, and when Beugeois had finished speaking, she cried out, quite beside herself:

"It is impossible! Jean de la Tour-Miracle is incapable of committing such an infamous deed!"

"Were he guilty of it," Madame Diane answered haughtily, "no hand would be laid on him in my domains. Cessé knows his duty, of course?"

"He has made all preparations for a vigorous resistance, madam," said Beaugeois.

"He has done well, and I am pleased. Before I surrender my godson the castle shall have been demolished, stone by stone."

So spoke that generous Madame Diane; and now let us return to Jean. He was walking about the courtyard, saying the same thing over for the thousandth time.

"That scoundrel Méré! That rascal Bourbet! That traitor of a De la Rochefoucauld! That miserable Corisande! Am I to be broken on the wheel because it pleased M. de Montluc to hang the carcass of a preacher to a tree?"

"Ah, sir," the ensign answered, "if each of my men and myself had been hung every time we were threatened with that fate, we should have lost many lives. In times like ours, such things are trifles, and I am astonished that at your age you should only be making their acquaintance."

M. de Beaugeois arrived and told Jean the result of his interview with Madame Diane.

"My noble and generous godmother!" cried La Tour-Miracle, with tears in his voice.

"I agree with you," answered Beaugeois, "but will you give me a moment to talk to you from the heart?"

"Willingly; speak sir, I am listening respectfully."

"Well, it seems that Cessé has just received reports from several of our men, and that we are going to fight your battle against overwhelming forces."

"You frighten me for my godmother and for myself, but mostly for my godmother."

"Listen to me without interrupting, and you will understand that we have no chance at all. In the first place, it is only too certain that M. de Guise has been assassinated before Orleans by one named Poltrot de Méré, and that all good Catholics are full of consternation."

"Ah, Barbillon, Barbillon," cried Jean, raising his hands to heaven. "For what frightful disaster will that rascal, that gallows-bird, not have to answer?"

"And," M. de Beugeois continued, "your name is on the lips of everyone. It is said you are the murderer's accomplice. It seems this Méré had a safe-conduct which belonged to you."

"I have already told you how that might be."

"I remember. But still, general indignation has been aroused against you, and I do not even know that it will not end by undermining the loyalty of the garrison."

"What! You think so?"

"I believe that I believe nothing. But judge for yourself. We are going to be attacked from every side. We can hope for help from nowhere, and is it not possible that Madame Catherine should profit by this occasion to despoil Madame Diane of all her property, with an appearance of justice?"

"You frighten me," Jean stammered, all dismayed. "So the dangers that hang over me are almost inevitable, and what is more, in succumbing to them I shall drag my noble protectress down to ruin with me? It is a horrible vision, from which I am determined to escape."

At that moment, Captain Cessé approached, and was informed of the subject under discussion.

"In good conscience," he said, "you are in a very difficult pass. I doubt not that at this moment half the Catholics in France, not to mention the Huguenots, are being accused of the murder of the Duc François by the other half. If a few wretches are already in the clutches of the judges — and don't doubt for a moment that there are such wretches — they are doomed to die, were they as innocent as the angels on high. This is only an opportunity for the gentlemen in black robes to show their zeal and make their fortunes; and the more people they condemn, the better Guise adherents they will pass for, and the more favor they will acquire."

"What to do?" Jean was murmuring, with his eyes to the ground.

"Ah! If things were not as they are, I know what I would advise you," the captain answered.

"Well?"

M. de Cessé took his hand, squeezed it hard, and said:

"I would speak to you somewhat in this fashion: M. de la Tour-Miracle, you are a man of honor; you cannot, in good conscience — merely to escape a few months in prison, at the end of which, willy-nilly, you will have

to be turned loose again — you cannot expose Madame Diane to a great danger, and so many brave people here to death. Be good enough then to go to the people who want you, and straighten out your affair before a tribunal which is thirsty for truth, not for human blood. That is what I would say to you; but once again, the case is not the same. If you set foot outside these walls, you are a lost man. And as a knight and as a Christian, I would deem myself the lowest of men if, by giving you interested advice, I should send you to a death that would be as inevitable as it would be horrible and infamous.”

Jean crossed his arms and took a few steps in silence. The feelings that crowded his soul were too confused ever to be unravelled. He thought of the serious risks that Madame Diane was about to run; he felt, in spite of the captain’s reticence and friendly tone, that the time would soon come when he would be looked upon by the inhabitants of Anet as a sort of evil genius; and when these dismal and humiliating pictures passed before his mind, he felt an irresistible impulse to end them by taking a courageous resolution.

But immediately he considered that this was a matter of running not to death, but to a thousand deaths, to refined torments, and nameless tortures. Then he felt his courage weaken, and he fell back into irresolution. More, this horrible end, at twenty, at the beginning of his life, at the moment when all around him had seemed to smile, when he was in love, full of faith in pleasures, in glory, this end was rendered more hideous to him by the

phantom of ignominy which followed him. To die like a miserable murderer; on the wheel, dragged over the hurdle, perhaps thrown on Montfaucon — that would be an eternal disgrace to his family.

In this cruel predicament, he sought, found, and rejected a thousand impossible means of escape from the dilemma. Suddenly, he struck his forehead.

“Eh! Pardieu, captain, if I were to leave the castle in disguise, I might succeed in escaping pursuit, and would rid you of this trouble.”

“That is a good idea,” said M. de Beaugeois, who did not seem to approve altogether of M. de Cessé’s chivalrous notions.

“My good friend,” replied the latter, smiling, “you could bring about but one result in this manner, that is to say, you would be arrested a few steps from here. You might escape from the peasants. But you do not know the country, and besides, at this moment, everyone is arresting everyone else. Though I know you are in the castle, I should be astonished to learn that more than a dozen of La Tour-Miracles who resemble you neither closely nor distantly — young, old, blond, brown, and grey — are not even now bearing a living witness to the zeal of the Aldermen, by their sojourn in the gaols of more than one small town. No, do not think of leaving this place.”

“I have decided, and nothing will stop me,” cried Jean. “It would be a felony to abuse your loyalty and Madame Diane’s goodness. I will go!”

"A young man's whim! I forbid you to go out! You insist? You resist? You mutiny? Good! Sergeant Roulebedaine, come here and instruct all the posts and sentinels to prevent M. de la Tour-Miracle from leaving this place. Now, my cavalier, do me the pleasure of going to help Corporal Boullet teach our peasants how to load, discharge, and reload a musket."

Then the captain shook Jean's hand and went off. But, seeing that his protégé stood still, plunged in thought, Cessé came back and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Come," said he, "do not be such a child. Who has not found himself in some little embarrassing position, some time or another?"

"Be at ease," answered Jean. "I am going to find Corporal Boullet."

But Jean was fully determined to extricate everyone from this difficulty.

Under the archway of an interior passage he saw a cart full of empty sacks and hampers, which was going out to bring in provisions. He looked about him. The driver was out of sight; there was no one about. He jumped up on the cart, hid himself in a hamper, and covered himself with a sack.

"Let us go; I shall be broken on the wheel," said he, with a sigh.

He had scarcely installed himself in his narrow dwelling when he heard a heavy step coming toward him, and a voice cried out:

"Not yet gone, Nicolas? You will not have the time to return."

"Oh yes, sergeant, sir; it is not far from here to Carville."

"Then go, and do not delay any further, and may the devil take you! "

The cart set out. Jean heard the various sounds of the courtyard, which was full of soldiers, and people coming and going; he heard the draw-bridge being lowered and the planks resounding under the wheels of the cart.

"Goodbye, Magdelaine; goodbye, Madame Diane; goodbye, honor," thought he, and, it must be confessed, the poor cavalier felt a few tears roll down his cheeks.

After a quarter of an hour, he judged it was time to leave his hiding-place. He raised the sack, put his head out, and perceived, at the corner of the woods, a troop of infantry, preceded by their ensign, two drums, and a captain on horseback.

"Courage! " he said to himself.

He jumped down from the cart, to the great terror of the peasant, and advanced to the officer.

"Sir," he said, "I surrender to you. I am Jean de la Tour-Miracle, innocent of the crime of which I am accused; but I have hope in the justice of God and men."

"By all the devils, I am delighted," cried the officer. "You will make your explanations in the proper time and place. But I have you, and that is all I need. Do you not recognize me? "

"Captain Brantôme!" cried Jean. "What luck to have such a gaoler!"

"Until I turn you over to suitable authorities," said Brantôme, "I shall treat you as a gentleman, so long as you do not try to escape."



XXIII

How Barbillion Proved His Attachment to His Master.

WE left Barbillion in the lonely little inn, to which the hostess' lovely eyes had drawn him to return, while Jean, in good faith, believed that he was galloping to the Catholic camp to prepare M. de Méré a lodging in the pound.

Barbillion stayed at the inn two days, and a regard for historical accuracy necessitates the avowal that in the course of those two days, spent at the corner of a table, between pitchers of that small wine which the good servitor had judged worthy of his attention, he had very few really lucid hours. But as his hostess' eyes began to lose their powers of fascination, Barbillion soon conceived the notion of seeking other pleasures on a larger stage, and after having hesitated between several towns, he decided on Auxerre, a city which is venerable on more counts than one; he had a long-standing acquaintance with it, and had acquired useful and intimate friendships in all its taverns.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that Barbillion had sought out the best company in the place, exactly.

He was too modest a lad to aspire to the audacity of seeking honest people's company. He resigned himself to a more humble, but, it must be said, very jovial, society. Moreover, he amused himself richly at Auxerre. From the first day of his arrival, the delightful existence he led there was attested by a great tear in the back of his coat, and a gash across his face. Barbillion was not ungrateful to fate, and he swore to himself that, if it were not for his master, from whom he could not be separated long and live, he would willingly have spent his entire life in the tavern of the "Good-humored Trout," which he had chosen for his domicile.

One day, while Barbillion, his elbows on one of the tables of this smoky Eden, played at Prime with two worthy fellows with suspicious-looking faces whose acquaintance he congratulated himself on having made, someone slapped him on the back, and he turned to see what friend or enemy Providence had sent him.

"Well, fellow countryman," said a tall rascal with a great red beard, "do you not recognize me?"

"Faith, no," said Barbillion, "I have never even seen you before."

"You are mistaken, old man. It is true that I have let my beard grow since we were comrades together, but we traveled together from Quercy almost to Beaumont."

"Ah! Devil's gut!" cried Barbillion. "You are one of that brave Captain Pierrot's bullies!"

"I see you have a good memory," said the other. "I have just heard that you are leading a life here fit to

drain the sea and swallow the fish. I hope we shall drink something together? ”

“ We shall even drink several things,” answered Barbillon. “ Only wait until I have finished this game of Prime, and I shall join you. Go and sit down over there.”

“ Don’t keep me waiting too long, for my throat is so dry I am afraid I’ll tear it if I speak, and my pocket has nothing in it but a hole.”

“ Call for what you want, I shall join you.”

And so Barbillon soon finished his game and rejoined his comrade, whom he found lustily tearing into a piece of ham and quenching his thirst like a sponge with a heavy bluish wine, worthy of the dyer’s use.

“ Well, what happened to the company after I left it? ” asked Barbillon.

“ Ah! The poor company,” answered Lorrain, with his mouth full. “ It is done for.”

“ How, done for? ”

“ Yes, done for. Captain Pierrot embroiled himself with us over the affair of your master and his cursed necklace. He left us, with five men who were willing to follow him. They said he wanted to turn soldier. I do not know what truth there was in that. But so much I know, that three days after, we met him and the five comrades.”

“ And were reunited? ”

“ We interred them, for they were all properly strung up along the road.”

“ It is a fine end,” said Barbillon, sententiously. “ I

always loved that brave Captain Pierrot, who was my master's servant a long time. And then what happened to you? "

"Faith," Lorrain continued, "when we had no more leader, everyone wanted to command; we fought each other, and had to separate. It was a pity, for we had a fine company there, that could laugh at the mounted police."

"Everything has its end," Barbillion observed. "And what are you doing now? "

"I am looking for work. If I were to find some captain who would take me, I would follow him. Without flattering myself in any way, I think he would be doing a good stroke of business, for I do not know anyone to equal me at picking a lock noiselessly. You, Barbillion, who are a man of spirit, should make yourself into a captain."

"Faith no," the soldier answered. "I have renounced all ambition. My present situation satisfies me. I have a very good master, with whom I do as I like, and, as you see, some very pleasant vacations. But," he cried on a sudden, turning himself about, "who are those rascals making such a noise in the street? My word! One cannot hear oneself speak. I'll throw the tables, the hostess and the house at their heads, if they do not quiet down."

"Ah, M. Barbillion," cried the tavern-keeper, "have you not heard of the frightful disaster that has occurred? "

"A frightful disaster? What is it, witch? "

"The great M. de Guise has just been assassinated by two scoundrels."

"Assassinated!" cried Barbillion, rising suddenly and at last remembering the letter in his pocket. "Assassinated! And by whom?"

"By a man named Poltrot and another scoundrel of a heretic who is called La Tour-Miracle."

"And that's nonsense!"

"Nonsense? I swear it is the truth. They have laid their hands on Poltrot, but his comrade ran away, and it is said he has hidden himself somewhere hereabouts. But he will soon be taken, by God's grace, and burned alive and drawn and quartered as he deserves, the scoundrel!"

Barbillion sat down again facing Lorrain. He was very pensive. Finally, he came to a decision, poured his comrade a drink, and said to him:

"I don't suppose, for a good sum, you would mind taking a man from the hands of the law?"

"No," replied Lorrain. "I see it is your master?"

"Certainly. He is as innocent as a new-born babe; but you care no more about that than I do."

"Ah, that's the truth now," cried Lorrain, laughing. "How much is there in it?"

"We will arrange that. In the first place, two men are not enough. Have you any friends here? I have already noticed five or six brave fellows myself, and I will speak to them; but we should be a dozen at least."

"I can manage it for you."

"You realize," Barbillion went on, "that haste is all-

important. Be here with your men in an hour. Once again, I'll pay fat fees."

"Right," said Lorrain, rising in his turn. "I shall be here in an hour."

And he kept his word, for, two hours later, the alert Barbillon, escorted by a dozen gallows-birds, took the road for the castle of Anet. His plan was to reach his master, tell him what was going on, and take him, by roads he knew, either to the coast or into Artois. Unfortunately, Barbillon did not reach Anet until an hour after Jean's departure, and he learned of his ill fortune from some peasants whom Sergeant Roulebedaine had demobilized.

He was not discouraged, but set out on his master's trail. Soon he perceived the escort, and, thanks to the information he gathered in the villages which the soldiers had traversed, he knew every detail of the strength of the company, as well as the name of the captain who commanded it.

"It is my former company," he said to himself. "A fine meeting! I'll know how to profit by this chance to save my good brave master."

He began to follow the company at a distance, so as not to be seen, nor his men, but not allowing them to get too far ahead of him. He continued in this way so long as daylight lasted.

At nightfall, the infantry stopped in a hamlet, and Barbillon gathered that they would stay there until the morrow. He waited patiently for twilight to make way

for darkness, and when the stars began to shine, he left his men crouched in a thicket at the entrance of the hamlet, and went forward whistling, with his hands in his pockets, to a house at whose door he saw two sentinels.

"Who goes there?"

"Friend! Now don't be stupid. It is I, Barbillion. I have come to rejoin the company."

"Go find the sergeant," said the two old soldiers.

"We have been forbidden to speak to anyone at all, and you know the captain isn't soft."

"Then speak low, imbeciles, and before I go to talk to the sergeant, tell me what you are doing here."

"Ah, my poor friend," one of the two soldiers answered, lowering his voice, "we have never had a worse occupation. That scoundrel of a La Tour-Miracle, whom we are guarding, gives us such a tingling in the ears as you can't imagine. There is no rest, night or day, and someone must always have his eye on him."

"I don't see you guarding him so well!"

"Eh! Besides the two of us, there are men in every room in the house; and, beside the rascal's bed, four soldiers, the sergeant and the ensign, who sleep across the door, not counting the captain, who gets up three or four times to see that his man has not flown away! We are all on tenterhooks."

"Oh, oh," said Barbillion, "I'm pleased to hear that, for he's a miserly hunk who never gave me wherewithal to drink his health with the smallest glass."

"You will take pleasure in guarding him then," the

arquebusier replied. "But go, I tell you again. We might be overheard gabbing."

Barbillon went off. He was not at all pleased with what he had learned. Decidedly, there could be no possibility of abducting Jean that night, nor any other; too many precautions had been taken.

"Let us think of something else," he said to himself.

He came back to his men, and, after a little thought, gave them their instructions. He made sure, above all, that his Lieutenant Lorrain understood him properly, and would answer for it that everything should be executed to the letter. Then he came back to the village, and presented himself to the sergeant, who was well pleased to see him back. Barbillon was a man who knew how to make himself appreciated.

M. de Brantôme was informed of the soldier's return, and as soon as he was told that the knave was speaking very ill of Jean, and accusing him right and left, the captain ordered that he should be put on guard on the right side of the prisoner, who rode on an evil nag between two files of soldiers with loaded arquebuses in their hands. The night passed very quietly, and in the morning they set out in their accustomed formation.

"Ah! Barbillon," cried the captive, rejoiced at seeing his servant again. "I count on you to help me out of this business! What have you done with my letter?"

"What letter?" answered Barbillon impudently. "You never gave me anything but blows, and I intend

to tell the judges all I know. It will be proper justice if you are sent to burrow with the moles! ”

“There is a wretch,” cried Jean, fidgeting on his horse.

“Faith, I really believe Barbillion will be a good witness,” said Brantôme. “In spite of all you told me, La Tour-Miracle, I have not hidden from you that you look very guilty to me, and it is more than time to punish all the assassins of that illustrious, of that incomparable, M. de Guise! ”

Brantôme had not cared so very much for the dead prince, but he cared very much for living princes, and, courtier at soul that he was, he was delighted at this fine opportunity of displaying his zeal. What might happen to Jean, he cared little, for he scarcely knew him. Besides he set his masters’ favor above all other considerations.

Jean made no answer to the captain’s speech. His heart was wounded, and he contented himself with throwing a contemptuous look at Barbillion, which the latter withstood marvelously well, but with such a peculiar look in his face that Jean could not avoid noticing it. He kept his eyes fixed on the soldier, who, in a moment, raising his head imperceptibly, gave him a wink which gave him even more to think about. Anxious to know if his hopes were justified, he continued to look at him until Barbillion, impatient at this lack of prudence, cried out with an arrogant air.

“The devil sir, are you a sorcerer, and are you trying

to give me the evil eye? Here are all my comrades who certainly expect me to become lame, deaf, or blind within the next half-hour."

"Impudent!" said La Tour-Miracle bitterly.

He sighed, thinking how mistaken he had been; what madness to have put hope in such a rascal as Barbillon! And yet the prisoner still hoped, and from time to time stole a look at his guard.

Toward noon, the troop halted at the foot of a hill, near a little pond which lay beside a hedge behind which was an extensive pasture. To right and left the country was cut up by ditches and fences of hawthorne and bramble. Captain Brantôme got down from his horse, and allowed everyone to rest, after sentinels had been posted.

"Even though the Huguenots are far from here," the prudent officer remarked, "the fact remains that it is a good thing to keep watch, and I do not want my knaves to lose the habit of it. Come, you imbecile," he added, turning to his body-servant, "bring me what is left of last night's cold chicken, and the bottle of Burgundy. M. de la Tour-Miracle will have breakfast with me. So long as there is life in one's body, it is pleasant to breakfast, is it not?"

This reflection, wise as it was, drew no more than a frigid smile from Jean. The soldiers, sitting on the grass, hastened to open their wallets and do honor to the provisions which, in one way and another, honest or dishonest, they had procured.

"What are you doing there, sly-boots?" Brantôme said to Barbillion, suddenly.

The latter had approached the captain's horse, had taken him by the bridle, and was leading him to the pond.

"Sir, I am taking him to water," the soldier answered. "Poor Hannibal is all winded!"

"All right, take him to water," answered Brantôme, sitting down and uncorking the bottle. "A glass of wine, La Tour-Miracle?"

"Willingly."

"My wine is good. Monseigneur d'Alençon gave me fourteen bottles of it before my departure. But what the devil is that rascal Barbillion doing with all that whistling? Will you be still, gallows-bird?"

"Sir, you know I am naturally cheerful."

As he spoke thus, he continued to lead the horse along the side of the pond, outside of the circle of soldiers, and close to the hedge.

Suddenly, there was a loud sound of firing, the two sentinels rolled on the grass like nine-pins struck by the bowl, and Barbillion cried in a thunderous voice:

"Forward! Sir, jump on the horse, and over the hedge."

Speaking thus, he took his sword in his hand and fell on the sergeant, whom he overturned. The soldiers, taken by surprise, remained almost inactive. Jean, on the alert, had risen to his feet and had already felled the ensign, who tried to hold him. But Captain Brantôme threw

away his bottle, jumped at Jean's neck, and, rolling in the grass with him, shouted in his ear:

"M. de la Tour-Miracle, if you do not surrender, I will stab you."

Meanwhile, the ensign had picked himself up, furious, and ran to Brantôme's rescue. The soldiers had recovered from their dismay and began to do their best. To cap the misfortune, the dozen rascals Barbillon had enlisted did not even wait for the enemy's fire, but fled, and Barbillon himself, fighting alone, with a bravery worthy of all praise, received such a good blow of a halberd on the head that he closed his eyes, opened his hands, let his weapon drop, and fell like a crumbling house, with his nose in the grass.

"God's body!" cried Brantôme. "The place is unsafe! Pick up the prisoner, put him on the nag, tie his hands and feet securely, and let us go without looking behind us! Come! Haste, there! Let us save our skins! I'll break the head of the first one who looks backward! Load your arquebuses! Forward, corporal! M. de la Tour-Miracle, I swear to you, by the respect I bear your father, that you shall not leave my hands alive!"

"Well," said Jean, "it is determined that I shall be broken on the wheel! That scoundrel Bourbet was an angel in comparison with Brantôme! Poor Barbillon, now he is dead!"



XXIV

Barbillon, Though Believed to be Dead, Moves Heaven and Earth.

BARBILLION's master did not know him. He was not so stupid as to allow the first halberd that came along to cut the thread of his life in this fashion, and besides destiny knew too well what she owed to this sublime spirit to deprive the world of his presence so early.

The halberd had turned in the soldier's hand, so that instead of striking with the edge, it had fallen flat on Barbillon's skull. There is nothing impossible about this circumstance; it is to be found right frequently in the books of chivalry, where the most furious blows are delivered without inconveniencing the hero.

Nevertheless, though it was not mortal, the blow had been well applied, and its victim stayed on the ground for about a good half-hour.

At last, consciousness returned to him little by little. Barbillon turned over, rubbed his eyes, sat up and, looking about him in a stupefied manner, succeeded in rallying his thoughts.

"The devil, the devil," was the first thing he said, as

he rubbed his head. "I received a famous thump, and many a person who is not a simpleton might well have stayed there. But I am thinking of myself! And my poor master? He is more than ever in danger of being drawn and quartered. Barbillon, my child, this must not be allowed! But what to do? If those miserable cowards, my friends, had not fled so rapidly! Come! Bah! Let us think no more about it . . . Or rather, let us think of it only to avoid paying them the amount they bargained for. I heartily regret the little advances I had to make them: I shall give them nothing more! "

Barbillon tried to rise; but he felt so weak he could not support himself, and he sat down on the grass again. Then an idea came to him.

"My men, no doubt, will return here to demand their money. In my present weak condition, they will kill me."

This reflection gave him back some of his strength. He made a prodigious effort, and succeeded in reaching the hedge, where he hid himself in the foliage.

He had done well, for suddenly he heard a noise of voices, and, laughing in his beard, he recognized his brave companions. He heard them lamenting the loss of their wages. They uttered the most terrible threats against him, if ever they met him, which amused him greatly. At last he saw them going away furious, and gave himself over completely to the pleasure which it was his excellent nature to feel whenever he cheated anyone.

"At least," he said to himself, "if I did not derive all

the profits I might have desired from my advances, I did amuse myself somewhat, which is something. Now, we must get out of here."

He had completely recovered his senses. He still felt some pain in his head, but his body was too solidly built to allow a blow that might have killed a steer to shake him for very long. He drew himself out of the hedge and shook his limbs.

"Now," he said to himself, "I must return to Anet, and in lively fashion. There is no other recourse."

He left, and he arrived.

He told the gate-keeper his name, which, added to his face, earned him a sideways look, and his former quality of servant to La Tour-Miracle, which suddenly invested him with great importance. He was led to M. de Cessé, who made him tell his story, a story, it is to be supposed, from which Barbillon eliminated certain details of too personal a nature.

"You have a brave and honest gentleman for a master," said M. de Cessé, "and I am pleased to see you are a good servant. I will inform Madame Diane of what you have told me, and if it is possible to do anything for La Tour-Miracle, you may be sure it will be done."

"If it is possible?" cried Barbillon. "So long as a man lives, there are always means to keep him from dying."

"You please me," M. de Cessé answered. "I like sharp lads. Sergeant Roulebedaine, see that this knave is taken care of, and has plenty to eat and drink."

M. de Cessé hastened to send to Madame Diane for permission to present himself to her, to give her news of her godson.

He did not wait long for an answer. The page who came to see M. de Cessé was followed by Magdelaine, who, pale, agitated, and with red eyes like one who has wept much, eagerly approached the captain.

"Tell me, sir," she said in a voice stirred with emotion, "if the news you bring is good or bad? I beg you, hide nothing from me. M. de la Tour-Miracle is my neighbor and my childhood friend, and everything that concerns him, especially in the unfortunate affair, which compromises his life and honor at the same time, leads to despair."

"I understand that, Mademoiselle," answered Cessé, who was a frank man, and had no malice in him. "My news is not good, but, fundamentally, it says nothing worse than what we know already."

Magdelaine thanked the captain with a gesture, and went off, deeply agitated. The page brought Cessé to Madame Diane's apartment.

When Barbillon's story had been repeated and discussed, the duchess remained pensive for some moments. A thousand ideas, a thousand plans, passed in review before her lovely eyes. At last she spoke thus:

"It seems to me that the most important thing would be to interest as many friends as possible in this young man, and above all, to gain time. Today, Guise's servants want victims, at all costs. In a few days they will be

more reasonable, and will ask no better than to limit their very just revenge to the real assassins."

"I am of your opinion, madam," answered the captain.

"Well, send me Meurongy and Beaugeois, and I will dictate some letters to them. Choose five or six lively and resolute men from among my people, whom we will make into couriers, and let them be on horseback and gone in an hour at the most. Go, my brave Cessé."

MM. de Beaugeois and de Meurongy hastened to their mistress, hoping that this time they would find themselves the happy instruments of some deep political plot, their dream at all times. But alas! It was a dream that was not to be realized! They had the discomfiture of writing letters which, in truth, were addressed to persons well able to play a rôle in the game of state, but these letters spoke only of M. Jean de la Tour-Miracle, and the old courtiers, their task accomplished, had ample excuse to complain of their mistress' incurable frivolity.

"Ah!" cried the inconsolable Meurongy, particularly. "Is it possible that there should be nothing to recommend to such friends but the salvation of a little Gascon cavalier?"

Meanwhile M. de Cessé, having received the letters, had confided them to various soldiers, whose devotion and intelligence he had already proved, and he was explaining to the last of these messengers what road to take to carry his despatch, when Barbillon appeared, coming out of the guardhouse, followed by Sergeant Roulebedaine, who was looking at him with great tenderness.

Barbillon had won the old sergeant's affection by recognizing in him an old comrade of the Piedmontese wars, in which he, the knave, had never himself served.

"Well, captain," said Barbillon, "you make all these beardless youths work for my young master, and you give me nothing to do?"

"Go and rest, my friend," answered M. de Cessé, "you must have need of it."

"You jest," said Barbillon, "I never rest. The errand you are giving that fellow there suits me perfectly. I will do it for him, and you, Roulebedaine, my child, if you have any regard for an old brother in arms, have me a jug filled with that little something which we were just drinking, and I will be on my way. I need no other provisions."

"What a madman!" said M. de Cessé.

"He is that way," answered the sergeant, weeping with admiration. "I have always known him thus. In the wars of the Piedmont, he was never otherwise."

Barbillon jumped to his saddle and went off at the head of all the couriers, exciting them by his remarks to travel as promptly as possible.

Soon one of the horsemen detached himself from the band, and took his own road; a few moments later, another did the same; then another, and at last Barbillon found himself alone.

We will let him gallop along at a great rate, to follow the well-mounted young man, who, charged with a mission like the others, began to follow exactly the same

road that Captain Brantôme, his men, and his prisoner had taken.

Soon he reached the troops and the courier addressed the soldiers of the rear-guard, asking if they were Captain Brantôme's men.

"Eh, God, yes, for our sins," answered the soldiers, "and if you have anything to say to the captain that will keep him from making us march so rapidly, you are welcome a thousand times!"

"Captain Brantôme, sir," said Madame Diane's servant, throwing a sideways look at the prisoner, "here is a letter, which you would do well to read without delay."

"Halt!" cried Brantôme to his people. "Four men stay by the prisoner; two others watch the courier, and let sentinels be posted to right and left of the road!"

Having taken these precautions, Captain Brantôme opened the despatch and began to read it very attentively. From time to time, he raised his eyes from the paper to glance suspiciously about him, at the courier, the captive, the soldiers, the road, and the horizon. Captain Brantôme was not the man to allow himself to be taken by surprise twice.

When he had finished reading, he thought for a few moments, stamped his foot, and gave unequivocal signs of impatience.

"So Madame Diane," he cried at last, "values this young man's life highly?"

"Very," the envoy answered. "By Our Lady! He is

her godson, and the whole castle has been thrown into consternation on account of his misfortune."

"Madame Diane must, however, understand," Brantôme went on in a vexed air, "that she is going to make me lose a magnificent chance of making my fortune. To deliver his father's murderer to a great prince! That sort of luck only comes once in a lifetime!"

"Sir, Madame Diane is sure that her godson had not assassinated anyone, and that he is incapable of such a scoundrelly crime."

"And what is that to me, my dear friend? Your mistress puts my devotion to a hard test."

"After all, it is only a matter of delaying your arrival."

"I know, I know," continued Brantôme, even more anxiously; "but if I arrive too late, there will be no need of me, and you can see that would be just as though I had not arrived at all."

"By Our Lady, captain, think on it! Madame Diane absolutely does not want you to reach Paris for another twelve days."

"Come, it is well. Return to her, assure her that I am her servitor. But be sure and tell her she must recommend me to the Portuguese ambassador. I am counting on it."

"You may be sure of it, sir. You shall be knighted as soon as you arrive at Lisbon. My mistress keeps her promises faithfully. But will you keep yours?"

"God's death, have I not said that I am Madame Diane's servitor? Go, now, I have no more need of you."

"Not so, sir," the courier answered resolutely, "I must now see how you go about satisfying us."

"Stubborn fellow!" Brantôme muttered. "Here am I in a pretty pass. Come, my children," he said to the soldiers, "let us march, and try to make up the time we lost."

They reached their halting-place early enough, and lodged, as usual, in the best place. The prisoner was put into a room, but before the usual guards had been posted with him, Brantôme had the following conversation with him:

"Madame Diane throws me into the greatest embarrassment on your account! She wants me to delay our arrival at Paris by twelve days, and faith, she knows how to hold me back by such important considerations that I will do as she desires."

"My great, illustrious godmother," cried Jean. "What a ray of hope, what unexpected joy she brings into my heart! "

"I am glad you are pleased," said Brantôme; "for I am not a tiger, and if it had not been a matter of the good will of the Guises toward me, I would long ago have let you run off where you pleased. So stop giving me black looks, eh? And also, if any misfortune should come to you, you must agree that I shall be in no way responsible! "

"M. de Brantôme," La Tour-Miracle answered, "what delights me most about you is your frankness. You do not seek to dissimulate your intentions by vain sub-

terfuges, and one always knows what to expect. Neither will I hesitate to tell you, on my side, what I think at this moment. I think that my lady godmother must have given you very good reasons to persuade you to act as you are now doing."

"Faith, my dear friend," answered Brantôme, laughing, "you will amount to something yet, for you have a quick intelligence. I do not boast of being a model of disinterestedness, and I think it proper to seek to make my way. But I am a gentleman, and I hate hypocrisy. So I will confess to you that for some time I have cherished the design of serving in a campaign in Portugal, for I am not advancing here. Madame Catherine, on the pretext that I have a light head, furnishes me with a great many occasions to have it filled with lead; but she never thinks of rewarding me, and I hope to earn more by fighting elsewhere. Now Madame Diane has all the Portuguese ambassador's influence at her disposal, and she promises me that I shall have the Order of Christ if I do not take you to the judges too fast — and I accept!"

"How will you go about it, so as to reconcile all your interests?" asked Jean.

"That is what you shall know tomorrow. For the moment, rouse your courage, be gay, Morbleu! And do not worry about the future. You shall have a good supper brought up to you, and your guards will come to keep you company. Good night, now, and no hard feelings!"

"No hard feelings," Jean repeated, and he shook the

hand that Brantôme extended to him as he burst out laughing.

And, in fact, Jean's disposition was less lugubrious that evening than in the past few days. The future, in truth, still held many dark promises, but it was a more distant future. Twelve days! It is a long time when one only expected to spend two or three more on this earth. Twelve days! In such a space of time as that there is plenty of room for hopes! Fortune has so many, and such sudden whims! In twelve days, she has time to change about twenty times!

At daylight, the corporal came into Jean's room while the latter was still sleeping in company with his four guards who lay about the room on mattresses.

"Sir," the soldier said, "I come to inform you that we shall scarcely be able to set out for another two hours, for the captain has had a violent fever all night."

"Oh! Oh!" said Jean. "Tell him that I am very sorry."

Jean understood what was up immediately. Poor Captain Brantôme had called the ensign and the sergeant to him at dawn to tell them he felt himself suddenly stricken with an illness which he hoped would not last very long, but which, for the moment, sapped all his strength, so that he could not get up.

At ten o'clock, the captain, feeling worse than before, asked for a physician. He was told there was none in the village. Madame Diane's courier, a very complaisant man, and learned, no doubt, in diagnostics, declared that the

captain had a fever of a very dangerous nature, and that he could not think of continuing his journey for several days, as to do so would be to put his life in danger. Besides, since he had no more to do but to return from whence he came, he would send a physician from the next town.

The whole company was in dismay. They already looked upon Captain Brantôme as dead. About two o'clock, the physician arrived, and, after a private conference with his patient, he confirmed all that the courier had said.

It was resolved, therefore to stop in the village. Brantôme seemed to be deeply grieved thereby. To make sure that the prisoner did not escape at least, the captain desired that he should share his room, where a bed was set up for him. The soldiers were forbidden to come near their chief's lodging, to which only Jean, the ensign, and the physician were admitted.

The evening of the day on which Hippocrates, with rare disinterest, had declared that Brantôme was in danger of death, had a curious eye been able to penetrate the carefully closed curtains of the fever-patient's room, he would have seen him sitting down to table with his prisoner and his ensign, playing at every sort of card-game, probably to distract his mind from his terrible sufferings.

And during this time, the couriers bearing Madame Diane's letters were making good speed, each in his direction, and Barbillon, who was posting like the others, was not sparing himself, as may well be believed.



XXV

Barbillon Once Again Displays the Unbelievable Spirit of Opportuneness with Which It Pleased Nature to Endow Him.

MESSIRE AURÈLE-AGRIPPA sat in the study of his manor of La Tour-Miracle. Before him was a wide table loaded with manuscripts and papers that formed a part of this sanctuary, and he was deeply absorbed in putting the finishing touches to that famous Ninth Book, which we saw far advanced at the beginning of this story, and which was to be the old lord's last Commentary on the Italian wars. This work was to yield nothing, in eloquence, beauty, science, prodigious knowledge of military matters, to Julius Cæsar's famous work, or even the no less famous one of Blaise de Montluc. But alas! The centuries, faithless trustees of this masterpiece, which would have carried the name of La Tour-Miracle down to remotest posterity, have swallowed up this volume without leaving any trace of it!

Wrapped in his dressing-gown, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa held his worn pen between his fingers. He

dipped it at frequent intervals, whenever he sought a word, or corrected a stubborn phrase, in a stone inkwell with azure arabesques. Moreover, from time to time, seeking a thought that escaped him, he raised his eyes to the silk-damask covered chimney on which hung his long rapier, his casque and his cuirass, inspiring tokens if ever there were any.

It needed all the love that Messire Aurèle-Agrippa had devoted to his book to enable us to find him with his mind employed in this manner. War still raged in all the provinces, and the Catholics' first success, the rescue of Lectoure, had not kept the Huguenots from rising everywhere and giving M. de Montluc and his friends plenty of business to attend to. The Seigneur de la Tour-Miracle, therefore, was constantly on the alert, but since his age ranked him with the reserve forces, he made use of his least moments of leisure to go home, take off his harness, and take up his books. It must be understood, of course, that while he thumbed their pages, the horses were ready in the stable, his armor kept in good condition, his people not far off, and his door carefully closed.

Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, then, was devoting all his attention to his Ninth Book, when his parish priest entered the room.

"M. le Baron," said the brave priest precipitately, "I bring you news."

"The devil take news, my father!" the lord answered. "You mean, no doubt, I must put my boots back into

the stirrups, and disrupt my work. Unless, of course, your news comes from my son Jean."

"Alas, no," said the pastor with a sigh, "I know nothing new as regards that young man, and I admire your stoicism."

"We warriors," the baron replied, "we know that we are born to dangers, and not to succumb to them like knaves. My son is a prisoner, I have no doubt, and in due time I shall receive a demand for ransom, which I shall pay, as my father paid mine more than once."

"But much worse might happen to your son," cried the parish priest, impatient at this paternal calm.

Messire Aurèle-Agrippa threw a sideways look at his spiritual adviser.

"I believed you too pious, sir priest, to believe that God, who is infinite wisdom, could, by taking away my son, extinguish so illustrious a family as mine, contrary to all good sense. But did you not say that you brought me news? Let us hear it!"

"I came to tell you that old Castillac has reappeared at his home, and that tonight a crowd of people was seen coming in this direction, some on foot, and some on horseback, all armed, and smelling Huguenotry a league away."

"Ah, ah!" said Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, rising with an altogether youthful ardor. "My scoundrel of a neighbor is beginning to play tricks again; he must be put in order! What a pleasure it would be if I could seize him and execute the sentence of Parliament myself by having

him hanged before my eyes! Come, Father, we must not give him time to take the field. I will call my people and take the saddle."

"Do so, M. le Baron," answered the parish priest. "In these unhappy times nothing must keep a gentleman from accomplishing his arduous duty."

"Arduous, did you say, Father?" the baron went on, as the servants who had run in in answer to his call armed him. "There is nothing disagreeable about duty when it is a matter of going off to cut that Castillac's ears off."

"You do not speak in a Christian manner, M. le Baron."

"The devil! An old soldier who is a good Christian but a poor theologian may be forgiven a few things. I believe I should even forgive the traitor all his perfidies, though he perpetrates a few pleasant ones. Among others, the hanging of that scamp of a preacher, whom you later bestirred yourself to bring back to life."

"I love not crimes, and still less can I forgive those that are not necessary."

"If one only killed people whom one absolutely had to kill, one would spend one's life sorting them out, and in the end, one might not kill anyone. I maintain that the preacher was well and justly hanged, and Castillac managed that affair very pleasantly."

"Since you say such pleasant things about him, I do not see what you can have to reproach him."

"I reproach him," cried Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, in

a furious voice, "I reproach him that, being a wretch such as he is, he dared think of marrying his daughter to my son Jean!"

"His daughter is a very virtuous young person," the good priest answered, "and I could wish you might have a daughter-in-law like her."

"It is well. Christophe, are my people ready?"

"Yes, sir, they are waiting for you."

"Who is there?"

"There is little Jacques, with the big arquebuse; Cliquet with the halberd; the big red-head from the mill, with the little mercenary you bought the other day, the boys from the mill, with swords and round bucklers, ten men in all."

"Hum!" said the baron. "Since the Huguenots killed my big Pernel, and Pierre went off with my son Jean, my army is composed of nothing but recruits. I am going to find M. de Persignan, and we will go along against the rebels together. Goodbye, priest!"

"Goodbye, M. le Baron, and take care of yourself. Remember your age; it is no longer fitting that you should make believe you are a young man."

The old lord went downstairs without listening to this wholesome advice, jingling his spurs and swinging his head in a martial fashion. He made his people mount, and, having met the gentleman he was going to find, and who had taken the field for the same reason as himself, a quarter of a league from home, he set off, with this new company, toward Castillac Castle, where other

Catholic lords had sent word to M. de Persignan they would be also.

The two campaigners and their escort had taken the same road which we saw Jean following, his mind occupied by very different thoughts from those to which the two old men abandoned themselves. Fear of an ambush and a few very judicious anxieties as to the valor of their troops supplied matter for all the conversation that took place.

Along the road, they were joined by various Catholic detachments. With the exception of their leaders, these little bands were very poorly armed, and did not have much air of confidence; but the officers, full of confidence in their courage, and carried away by that hateful ardor which gives civil wars such a desperate character, were very little worried over their wretched situation, and flattered themselves that they were still strong enough to fight the heretics, and to arrest Castillac and execute justice upon him.

In the middle of the night, the three or four horsemen who had been sent ahead as scouts suddenly returned.

As Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, on account of his age and the consideration inspired by his military talents, exercised supreme command of the army, it was to him that the couriers reported. All the gentlemen surrounded him, and lent eager ears to the information they were about to be given.

“Monseigneur,” said the most eloquent of the soldiers,

"we have just seen, at the mouth of the hollow road, in the little prairie at the end of it, a sort of camp, which cannot be composed of good Catholics."

"And who gives you that opinion, my dear friend," said Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, laying his index finger along his nose, in a scrutinizing fashion.

"Monseigneur, we think so because the people whom we saw from a distance, warming themselves beside great fires, seemed to us to be covered with good cuirasses, and all had casques on their heads; besides, we saw sentinels standing guard better than we usually do."

"It is true," Messire Aurèle-Agrippa returned, frowning. "You fellows have the sad habit of going to sleep like dormice when you are posted as sentinels, while the Huguenots stand guard like angels, or like real soldiers, which comes to the same thing. There is some good in those people. How numerous are the men before us?"

"I do not know, Monseigneur," the rustic answered. "Only the sentinels and the groups warming themselves can be seen. The rest must be lying on the ground. But there are many horses, tied to pickets."

"Well," said the baron, "we must not spare ourselves here, gentlemen. M. de Montluc was always of the opinion that a good captain must trust no one but himself to make a reconnaissance. That was also the opinion of that great warrior, M. le Maréchal de Strozzi. Let us alight and go and verify the report our scouts have brought. You others, my comrades, stay here at ease;

arms ready, and without getting off your horses. In attempting a surprise, we must not be surprised."

Messire Aurèle-Agrippa alighted, as did M. de Persignan and the other gentlemen. All, wrapped in their coats to hide the gleam of their armor, advanced carefully along the road, and came to a place where, slipping into the bushes, they could see the camp of which they had been told perfectly.

On a sort of plateau a dozen fires were lighted, and horses all ready saddled stood close by. On the ground, some dark masses could be distinguished. These last, no doubt, were sleeping soldiers. Several men, leaders probably, were gathered about the fires, and though the distance was great enough, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa and his friends perfectly recognized the Seigneur de Castillac in one of the captains, when a jet of flame illuminated his face.

"There is our game," said the baron in a low voice. "Our duty now is to capture him."

"Agreed," M. de Persignan answered, in the same tone, "but success does not seem very easy to me. Here are two sentinels, fifty paces from us, who will perceive us at the slightest noise, and I am afraid that we are not the stronger."

"Let us try, in any case," the old knight answered.

"But reflect, sir," a gentleman observed, "that these Huguenots number at least two hundred, well armed and well mounted, and that we have not even as many ill-accoutered peasants."

"If one were to calculate the chances so carefully, one would never do anything. Gentlemen, since I have the honor of commanding you, I take the responsibility on myself, and we shall attack."

No one spoke a word. They returned to the body of the army, and the leader having given his instructions, they all advanced in double columns, and in the most complete silence, on the Huguenot encampment.

The important thing was to come out on level ground before the Protestants should take alarm. If this was successful, there was hope that they would be overcome on account of their ignorance of the real inferiority of the attackers.

But unfortunately the sentinels, as M. de Persignan had foreseen, were keeping a good watch, and it was impossible to take such precautions that in the end the marching of these heavy peasants should not make some noise. The two vedettes fired their muskets at the first arrivals, killed three men, and fell back on their main body, yelling like madmen.

"Forward, my friends," cried Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, brandishing his sword. "Forward for the good cause!"

In a twinkling, the Huguenots had gained their mounts, and when the shock came, the better part of the enemy was ready to fight. The Seigneur de Castillac, wearing a casque surmounted by a red plume, fought like a lion, and the other Protestant chiefs did likewise, so that after a few seconds, the Catholics found themselves very smartly outfought. When they were charged in

their turn, they weakened. The gentlemen held firm, and despite their age conducted themselves with a valor which did not indicate second line troops, but all in vain. Their vassals broke rank, and, to the despair of the general who had ordered the attack, all fled. All fled; it was not a retreat, but a rout, and as complete a rout as ever was seen. Burning with anger and indignation, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa was resolved to die, and would not retreat a step. Fortunately for him, he received a blow on the head that bewildered him, and M. de Persignan, more wisely, seeing that resistance would do no good, seized his old friend's bridle, and, putting both spurs to his horse, escaped from the *melée*, surrounded by the other gentlemen.

When the Baron de la Tour-Miracle opened his eyes once more, he found himself a good half-league from the field of battle, surrounded by his friends, and by a few henchmen, braver than most of his army.

"Gentlemen," said the old lord in a pitiful voice, "we are all dishonored."

"I do not think so at all," said an unknown voice beside him.

The desolate lord raised his eyes, and perceived a tall, thin, dry, tanned knave, who looked at him with a rather audacious air.

"Who are you, knave, to dare to contradict me?" he asked.

"Monseigneur," the other answered, "I am your servant, Barbillon, your son's servant, and since you have

taken me out of the hands of the Huguenots, who would have treated me ill, I do not think that you have wasted your time. Besides, you made a magnificent and masterly retreat, I swear to you."

"If you are my son's servant, and I believe it, from your look, for he always had a way of taking rascals with him, you come, no doubt, to ask me for money to pay a ransom."

"Not at all, monseigneur, I come to ask you, in his behalf, to be so good as to intervene to keep him from being drawn and quartered, or broken on the wheel, but more probably drawn and quartered."

Barbillion explained himself, and the gentlemen cried out as one man. All begged Messire Aurèle-Agrippa to leave for Paris without delay.

"If you have no money in cash," they told him, "our coffers are open to you. Save your dear son, neighbor, and spare the nobility of the province the shame of seeing him perish so miserably."

Messire Aurèle-Agrippa had no need to be stimulated.

"What a sad day!" he cried. "To learn that my only son is in such a pass, and at the very moment when I have just been beaten!"

"Go on!" said Barbillion. "Monseigneur, I tell you, you made a superb retreat, which does you honor, and the enemy have no more general, since I killed him."

"You killed the general?" said M. de Persignan. "What did he look like?"

"Faith, he was a big man, with a red plume on his morion."

"He killed Castillac!"

It was a cry of joy. Everyone congratulated themselves on being rid of the traitor, and were almost convinced on the spot that they had won the most brilliant victory.

Messire Aurèle-Agrippa went home, followed by Barbillon, and made preparations for his departure. He wrote to M. de Montluc what had happened, and despite himself yielded to his humor and, following Barbillon's advice, did not admit his defeat. Besides, he was beginning to understand that his retreat must have been quite masterly.

The Baron de la Tour-Miracle spent the morning putting a little order into his affairs, as a prudent man must when he leaves on a journey whose end he cannot foresee. He drew all the money he could from his tenants, had his bags packed with what he needed, not forgetting the precious manuscripts and the commentaries, which never left him, and, about ten o'clock, followed only by Barbillon, and determined to make great speed, he left for Paris, to fight against fate for his son Jean.



XXVI

Brantôme and His Prisoner Receive a Visit which Greatly Surprises Them.

THE village in which Brantôme was quartered was called Bourg-Vieux. The days had passed rapidly enough to suit La Tour-Miracle, but very slowly and tediously to Brantôme's mind. To remain away from Paris while all the Lorrain partisans gathered eagerly about the family of the Duc François; to abandon the court when Madame Catherine, happy at having been rid of a too-powerful friend, was, perhaps, and most exceptionally, in a generous mood, was a deplorable situation from every point of view. But what! He was staking all on the success of the campaign in Portugal, that last hope of salvation, best-founded of all, to make himself talked about, and to return to France with a sufficiently imposing renown to oblige the Queen to make use of a gentleman who was honored by foreign sovereigns. But to attain this brilliant goal, Madame Diane's good-will was quite necessary; she could save him half the journey.

"Was it necessary, to my misfortune," Brantôme said to his prisoner twenty times a day, "that this Portuguese

ambassador should have retained such a deep veneration for Madame Diane that if she were to say a word against me to him, I would run a great risk of not succeeding in the worthy man's country any better than I have so far in my own? "

"My dear captain," Jean answered, "my experience of the things of this world is very slim, but since we have had the good fortune to live together, I understand, I must confess, why, in spite of your brilliant merits, you have remained a captain of a company of foot-soldiers, without any further honor nor favor."

"Speak, dear oracle, I am listening with both ears."

"You are marvelously brave, everyone knows that, and what is more, a courtier to the tips of your fingernails, and ready to do much to please your masters; but, forgive me for what I have to say, you are devilish indiscreet, and you have in your body a certain demon which impels you to rouse laughter at the expense of anyone at all. For example, you would give my head to the Guises willingly, but if some witticism on the late duke came to your lips, you would share the block with me rather than not say it."

"Great philosopher, you do not see things so badly."

These conversations, instructive as they were to the two who took part in them, did not fill all the days, and, besides the unpleasantness of probably letting many good occasions to make his fortune go by, Brantôme was still more, and most supremely, unhappy on account of his forced and prolonged imprisonment in a room that

was forever shut up, and always dark like a Lapp's hut during six months out of the year.

But the castle of Anet did not forget its protégé, and by the same token, its protégé's guardian. Captain Cessé had given orders to the majordomo, and every day the courier who went to see whether Captain Brantôme kept his promise was accompanied by a great scullion on an enormous horse, loaded with two hampers, exactly like a kettle-drummer between his two instruments. Wines of Spain, wines of Italy, wines of France, fat pullets, capons, hams, venison, and the rest, Captain Cessé saw to it that Jean and Brantôme should at least have the pleasures of the table, in default of other pleasures, and Brantôme put up with it marvelously well.

"My good friend," he said to La Tour-Miracle, "when I leave my room, I do not quite know whether I shall be able to get into my cuirass. I feel that I have become frightfully fat."

Jean did not get fat, because, after all, he had the Chatelet of Paris and what came after, in view.

Despite Captain Cessé's provisions, and the courier's daily visit, the boredom kept increasing. At least, Jean had worries to distract him, but the unfortunate Brantôme had nothing. He lay stretched out on his bed all day, and did not even have the heart to gamble any more. Why should he have gambled? The ensign, Jean, and himself had turn and turn about won and lost their money. Besides, by a deplorable trick of fate, none of them had very much.

They had come to the sixth day of this sad seclusion; it was noon, and Brantôme was trying to sleep; the ensign was in the courtyard playing at quoits with the sergeants. La Tour-Miracle was wondering which was best, the gibbet, the wheel, or the axe, when Madame Diane's usual courier came into the room. He was followed by a small young man who kept himself in the shadow of the doorway, and to whom no one paid any attention.

"Well, Gilles," said Brantôme, yawning frightfully, "you see we are still at our posts?"

"Yes, sir, yes, it is very well, and they are well satisfied at the castle."

"If they were not, they would be very difficult to please. But I shall not wait the twelve days, my poor Gilles. I would die of plumpness and boredom before that."

"The contrary is to be hoped, sir. I bring you provisions, and among them Captain Cessé recommends a pasty of beccaficoes, whose twin he ate last night, and praised highly. M. de la Tour-Miracle, have you any errands to give me today?"

"I have, my honest fellow," answered Jean. "Tell my lady godmother I am ever her devoted slave, and take charge of this little letter, which you are to give to the person whose name is inscribed on it."

"It is not worth while to give it to me, sir, your letter yesterday was returned to me unopened, and I know the same would happen to today's."

Jean crumpled the paper sulkily and put it back in his pocket, while Brantôme began to laugh.

"These devils of Gascons!" he cried. "And to think that we are all the same! In love, and rather with two women than with one, and three than two. The greatest misfortunes make no difference, and with a rope about one's neck, one would still cry out, 'I love you.' Who is this little man, my dear Gilles, whom you brought with you, and who is standing there in the corner, as meek as a choir-boy?"

"Sir, it is an Italian page, whom Madame Diane took into her house several days ago. He plays the lute right well, and knows all manner of fine songs by heart; among other things, he can recite the finest passages from the poets of his own country and of this."

"Ah! There are talents for you! If we have this young man with us, he will amuse us somewhat, and make the time go faster."

"That is what M. de Cessé said to Madame Diane, and so this page was sent to you. Only, as he is a gentleman, you are prayed to have some regard to him, and not to treat him as you would your foot-soldiers."

"Whom do you take me for, knave?" cried Brantôme, laughing. "Do you think I don't know what it is to be sweet and humane? Really, because I have done my duty in guarding a man accused of a political crime, you fellows will soon make me out to be a tiger! How is he called, my lord page?"

"Sir, he is called Flaminio."

"Approach, Flaminio, approach, my child, you are not in a wild beast's cavern here, and though the place is very dark, I agree, you will find yourself among people who worship Apollo, and fine music, and good singers. Come near, then, do not be afraid, and give me your hand, God's death!"

The page had stayed in his place, holding his black velvet cap in his hands, and twisting it with an embarrassed air. His long hair fell over his face, which he kept lowered, and it was evident that, because of his shyness, the captain's order did not please him. However, he made up his mind. Jean, sitting near the window, was looking at him abstractly. He turned his back on Jean, and advanced to the bed, at the foot of the room, and held his ungloved hand to the captain.

"Come, that is well, there is a fine child," said Brantôme, shaking that hand. "A pretty face!" he added, as he pushed the page's hair back. "A pretty face," he repeated looking at the page fixedly. Then he was silent, jumped down from the bed, looked at the page, Gilles, La Tour-Miracle, and said not a word.

A profound silence reigned in the room for several minutes. The captain walked up and down smiling into his moustache. As he passed before the little mirror above the mantel, he twisted the points of his moustache, to give them a better curl, and adjusted his ruff.

"Come, come," said he, laughing, "we shall have music, and life will become bearable! Now my dear Gilles, have you finished all your errands? You have

nothing more to do here? You see we are not thinking of leaving? That La Tour-Miracle has not been executed? Good day and good health! Until tomorrow! ”

Gilles bowed deeply and retired. He had no sooner closed the door than Brantôme, standing stiffly, a smile on his lips, and posing gracefully, opened his mouth to say I know not what to Flaminio, to whom he had turned; but the latter cut him short without ceremony.

“ I know what you are going to say, Captain,” he exclaimed. “ You have recognized me.”

Recognizing the voice, Jean cried out in surprise, and leaving his somber thoughts, ran up and stood before the page.

“ It is she! ” he cried, in deep surprise.

“ Ah! it is she,” said Brantôme. “ I am delighted! But though Madame claims that I have recognized her, I confess I did not know that she was at Anet. I am amazed! ”

“ Neither do I come from there,” said the page. “ We shall soon explain all that. But first, allow me to tell you quickly what is most pressing. You no doubt do not intend to treat me loosely? ”

“ God damn me,” answered Brantôme, “ I would rather . . . what would I not rather? But at least, in fairness, ask this cavalier the same question.”

“ I know this cavalier well, and I do not need to say anything to him.”

“ The fact is that here he is, planted there, like Lot’s wife changed into a statue, no more no less. Hola, my

lover, wake up! So far as I know, it is not for me that madam comes here. It must be for you! ”

But Jean made no haste to answer. Surprise had given place to an expression of discontentment. Jean evidently did not speak because he did not want to say anything.

Brantôme looked from his prisoner to Flaminio and back again, with a light irony in his eye.

“Come then, M. de la Tour-Miracle,” he said. “Since your memory does not serve you well — I dare not say as much of your heart, despite a certain story about a letter, which becomes quite incomprehensible to me, I must make you acquainted with the most beautiful person of the court of Navarre. Bend the knee, discourteous knight, before Madame Corisande! ”

Jean at last found means to express what he wanted to say in a manner that seemed to him suitable to the circumstances.

“Madam,” he said, “forgive the profound astonishment in which you see me plunged. Your presence here, your strange costume, the situation in which I left you, the ideas which occupied you then, all these things are so little reconciled to one another, that I really do not know what to think, and I seem to be the plaything of a vision. M. de Brantôme explains your coming as it pleases him. But I know too well, and by good proofs, how false those suppositions are. Certainly, madam, I cannot believe that my poor merit should ever have found grace in your eyes, but I would like to be able to tell myself that you

are not the sole cause of the misfortune into which I have fallen."

"I am the sole cause of it," Corisande answered. "I do not pretend otherwise, nor deny it; the manner in which I acted toward you was odious and cruel; my perfidy surpassed all other perfidies in blackness, and if you have any more terrible reproaches to make to me, dispense with them, I have made them to myself! "

Corisande spoke with great vehemence, her beautiful black eyes shone with a dark and magic sparkle, and all her frail and lovely body trembled like the leaf of a tree, swayed by her agitation. She did not weep. Her look was dry as steel, as flames.

Brantôme looked at her with an admiration which he did not attempt to conceal.

"God's body, madam, but you are beautiful," he cried, "and if it is true that you have all but ruined this cavalier, I should like to be in his place, to stipulate, by way of reparation, that I should be strangled only by your beautiful hands! "

"But, if I have done you so much harm," Corisande continued proudly, "I have also an excuse for it. Were you not my brother's murderer? I believed it; at least I had been persuaded it was so, and frivolous as I was then, it was only too easy for me to lend an ear to the instigations of Pierre Lescout. I have compromised you. I wish to save you."

"Let us see how you plan to go about it," Brantôme interrupted, "for this, take note, concerns me directly.

At this moment, I am the only representative of royal justice, and to save the gentleman, you must address yourself to me."

"But," cried Jean, "you make me play a most disagreeable rôle. Madam, you have no doubt greatly harmed me. I, on the other hand, have acted like a fool."

"Good," said Brantôme, "we are returning to my subject. My friend Jean is, or has been, in love."

"But there is no need," Jean continued, "that you should now come to ruin yourself with me! If you are so generous as to interfere in my behalf, you can do it in a very easy way, which does not compromise you. Write to my judges, or at least to those who will be my judges. Go to Paris, even; beg M. de la Rochefoucauld to testify to my innocence, he to whom it is so well known, and you will have saved me, and I will feel a far greater gratitude to you than the indignation your friends' perfidy might have roused in me. Why see me? Why come here, to a camp, in the midst of soldiers who tomorrow will know who the page Flaminio is, and make a plaything of your reputation? Do you not see M. de Brantôme before you, and do you not know him at all? In truth, madam, you are no longer wise: it seems to me that regrets have turned your head, and, after all, this is not the place for you!"

"I am here," Corisande answered, "and I wish to stay here."

"Do you hear that?" said Brantôme. "Ingrate that you are! Do you not know that all the nobility of France

would gladly give up its titles and its lands for your good luck? Madam, you have given your heart into very poor keeping, and I think our man has other loves.”

Corisande was very pale, but she was not listening to Brantôme, and kept her eyes stubbornly fixed on Jean, who, as was his custom under similar circumstances, was beginning to feel all his firmness, his resolution, his prudence, all his virtues of resistance, deserting him one after the other, or at least tottering.

He took a milder tone, and, as if seeking a better point of attack, he changed the subject.

“How did you come here, madam? How comes it that Gilles told us you belonged to my godmother’s household?”

“With money everything is easy,” Corisande answered. “I gave this man some, and he said all I wanted him to say. But,” she cried, with a stamp of her foot, “is it not possible to speak without a witness? M. de Brantôme, I am your friend, but you must understand since I have come here, that I have many things to say which need not be overheard. Have you come to that, that I am obliged to tell you to withdraw?”

“The devil,” thought Jean, “I did not believe her to be so bold!”

“Madam,” Brantôme answered, “I would willingly obey you, were I able to leave my room; but you must know that I am very ill. Neither can I leave my prisoner in your keeping in some corner of the house where I am not myself, since he has too much good taste not to prefer

to follow you rather than return to me. So I am obliged to be present at your interview, and, as I am not naturally curious, I am desolate. In truth, I could tell you that I am going to sit in an armchair and force myself to go to sleep, from discretion, but I assure you I would be deceiving you, for never in all my life have I been so wakeful."

Corisande pouted in a ravishing manner; she twisted her fingers in anger, stamped her foot again, and said:

"Then stay, sir!"

Then she turned to Jean, and looking straight into his eyes with an expression of impassioned sentiment which would have melted a glacier:

"You loved me," she said to him.

"Yes, I loved you" Jean answered, his voice full of emotion. "But what have you done with that love? You took advantage of it to lead me to where I now am. Without you, I would have escaped from Beaumont, and I would not have lent the name of La Tour-Miracle to an assassin. Certainly, madam, I loved you, and like a madman, and more than I should have done! Who, seeing your beauty, your infinite charm, will not understand it? I loved you, but I am very glad to be able to say to you: I do not love you any more!"



XXVII

Jean Will Not be Quartered; but His Heart is Strangely Drawn.

JEAN pronounced that terrible "I do not love you any more," in a choked voice, and that cry perhaps came from his conscience rather than from his heart. After having given voice to it, he was almost surprised himself by his own boldness, and he looked at Corisande uncertainly, and almost fearfully.

She, on her side, seemed troubled, and cruelly hit. She made a move as if to leave the room, never to return, and Brantôme, who would have been very little satisfied by such a sudden ending to the plot, was even about to interfere, when she recovered, and continued the delicate conversation in this manner:

"You do not love me any more," she said. "I see that you are lying. It is not possible that you should have changed so completely. I had your love, had I not, when I made you fall blindly into every snare that was laid for you? And what did I do, then, to rouse your heart and make your head so mad? A look, a word, a pressure of

the hand, the most frivolous favor sufficed. I dominated you, and you were my slave."

"I do not want to be your slave any more," Jean answered. "You have made me suffer too much, and not only do you not love me, but, I adjure you to tell me true, you deceived me with another?"

"I thought I deceived you," Corisande went on, sadly, and as though absorbed by new thoughts; "a cavalier whom my brother had chosen to be my husband was in the city, and visited me secretly. I encouraged him then, to hurt you. But let us leave that. That night of the ball, when I saw you attacked and betrayed by everyone, when I knew there was not a soul there who was not hostile to you, first compassion, and then shame, opened my heart to drive out hatred. Did you not see my glances? Did you not receive my letter? Do not answer me yet! I know how you despised those tokens of my repentance! Then I did not hesitate for very long. I saw that in my turn I was stricken with the passion of which I had made a plaything. I left Beaumont. I learned you were a prisoner. I will follow you to Paris; it will be easy for me to defend you. You do not love me any more?" she added, smiling, while her sweet voice trembled. "So be it. You lie, I assure you. But punish me, you have cause to do so; repulse the hand I offer you; condemn me, avenge yourself. I will stay here, I will save you, and then you shall see that you must love her who will have ruined herself for you!"

"My children," said Brantôme, in a paternal tone,

“allow me to interfere. I am deeply touched by what I have just heard, and I confess, or rather I pride myself, that I would not have to be told the quarter of it to make me as crazy with joy as the very maddest person was ever locked up! My good La Tour-Miracle, you listen quietly to things you should not hear except on your knees and with your forehead in the dust! What! Madame Peyrecave comes to save you, and she will save you, I make no doubt; she offers you her hand, so sweet to hold; her heart, so intoxicating, and her fortune, so fine, her influence, which is so great, and you make a face! That is what physicians call being stricken with insanity. Madam, I have been very much in love with you, and I glory in it; but you despised me, you treated me very badly, and in consequence, I narrowly missed acting very badly toward you, because I was not used to being dismissed like that; but all that will not prevent me from boldly taking your part here! Corbleu, madam, pay no attention to the silence of this cavalier; the wretch’s head is full of a flirtation he picked up again at the castle of Anet. Question him, and he will confess all.”

The good Brantôme sat down again, having in this manner, in his opinion, thrown oil upon the fire. But Corisande seemed determined to ignore that flirtation which he had just mentioned for the second time. She had not ceased to look at Jean, who, for a long time, had kept his eyes lowered, and then, in the middle of the captain’s speech, had raised them, met those of Corisande,

and Faith! when Brantôme had ended his harangue, the two lovers were smiling at each other.

But, as people who go to sleep listening to the reading of a tragedy wake with a start when the nasal sounds that brought them slumber cease, so Jean emerged from his amorous contemplation when Brantôme had finished speaking, and though he had paid no attention to what the captain had said to him, his ears had pricked up at the word "flirtation," and he recovered from his involuntary ecstasy to comment on Brantôme's evil thoughts, which was very loyal on his part.

"Madam," he cried then, "I confess it, I was too hasty, in telling you that I did not love you any more. When you are away, I detest you. When I am present before you, whatever I wish, whatever I do, I cannot escape from your dominion over me. And so, since you wish it, I love you, and I cannot defend myself! But . . ."

"Say no more," Corisande interrupted. "I do not want to hear any more. It is to M. de Brantôme I will address myself now. You see," she added, turning to the captain, "that M. de la Tour-Miracle is going to become my husband."

"Yes, if he is not drawn and quartered," said the rejected lover, bowing.

"He shall not be, I swear to you. I have all the proofs to establish his innocence. Peace is being negotiated between the Catholics and Protestants at this moment, and M. de la Rochefoucauld is ready to testify in Jean's behalf."

"One minute," the latter cried. "I believe you will end up by making me altogether angry. On my honor, I am being treated like a child! You wish to wed me? But, madam, allow me to say I do not consent to it! It is true that I love you; I love you in spite of myself, unjustly, unreasonably; but in any case, I love you! But that is no reason to wed you. What you just said to the captain is very true; if I love you, I love another also, and I love one who has never betrayed me, never deceived me . . . nor ever listened to me very much, I will agree; but in any case, ill-received as I may be, I intend to remain faithful, and that is why I cannot wed you!"

"Pay close attention to that, madam, I beg you," Brantôme observed, with a knowing look. "It is worth hearing, and our friend must be devilishly stricken, for all his letters are returned to him unread, and, as you see, he is only the more determined to constancy."

Jean really believed that he had discouraged Corisande this time. She was silent a moment, looking at the floor. Then she shook her pretty head with that graceful movement that was so characteristic of her.

"Let us leave this error of your soul stand for what it is worth," she said. "I know what my rival is, and I know what I am. I made that courier talk. It seems that she is beautiful, my rival, and charming too; but she is the daughter of . . . But why should I insist? I do not hate her; if she loves you, it is that her heart is like mine; but she allows herself to be adored without making any response, and I want to cherish you, even though I am

ill-treated. We have talked of these things long enough. You know, Jean, you know, Monsieur, who the page Flaminio is. I will stay with you, and now, let us let time pass, we shall see what it brings you.”

“Yes, madam,” Brantôme answered, “that is wisely spoken. Allow me to add only one word to it. If, by a wonderful chance, Monsieur should continue to be insensible, allow me to hope that you will at last have pity on the most wretched lover that ever appeared since lovers have been ill-treated, and that, in this village inn, you will forget the harshness with which you overwhelmed me last year at court.”

Corisande began to laugh, and there the conversation ended. Jean was not displeased. He did not know any more how to answer his beautiful mistress’ words; not that her feminine logic had won over his reason; but when Corisande spoke, he listened much more to her eyes than to her voice, and allowed himself to be bewitched, scarcely offering any resistance. And then he had another reason. He felt himself half-conquered, because he felt ridiculous.

“Plague on it!” he said to himself, “I am like handsome Paris, and the ladies are disputing over my little person. I am very much pleased, no doubt, but I will make people laugh at my expense. For after all, unless I turn Turk, I cannot marry everyone, and I would prefer to be left to act according to my fancy. But it is written on high, that I shall spend my moral and physical life in being imprisoned. May heaven grant that the physical

part of it shall not end very badly! As to the moral part, things never get to such a pass that one cannot recover."

Certainly, if the two gentlemen and the page had remained alone together for long, the conversation would have begun all over again; besides, Brantôme did not mind; he was once more trying all the powers of his look, and of his air, on Flaminio. Jean was beginning to think that was not quite as it should be, and Corisande still had many things to tell La Tour-Miracle. Fortunately, the ensign came in, and the subject was changed, and then came the physician. The conversation ran on a thousand subjects. In a corner, the doctor and Jean began a game of chess. The ensign gave them advice. And so Corisande found herself having a tête-à-tête with Brantôme.

We have never learned what she said to the captain. She told him many things, and very serious things most probably, for he listened very attentively and answered with a great deal of vivacity. If the fact is noted here, it is not that any other importance is attached to it except that Jean took it very much to heart, and the demon of jealousy tormented him sorely. At last he finished the game of chess as quickly as he could, and came to put an end to the conversation that displeased him so much. When he approached the couple, who had retired into a corner, Corisande looked at him tenderly and stealthily squeezed his hand, as though to thank him for being so good as to be tormented.

"The devil!" said Jean to himself. "The further I

go, the more I am led astray, and the more I commit myself! This is becoming altogether too serious. By Jupiter, I love only Magdelaine! And this ravishing divinity here intoxicates me and makes me forget everything."

Captain Brantôme made the most unexpected announcement as the supper was coming to an end. It was probably a result of his conversation with Flaminio.

"My friends," the captain said, "I am very much bored with being ill, and I have firmly decided to feel better immediately."

"You are not thinking of it!" cried La Tour-Miracle. "This is only the sixth day; are you not about to break your word?"

"Have no fear, my dear prisoner," Brantôme answered. "I know what I want, and you will be none the worse for it. Ensign, you will tell the sergeants this evening that I am much better, and shall be able to review the company tomorrow. Ouf! I shall be glad to stir my legs, and I hope everyone will be satisfied with me."

"I think so too," said the page, accompanying his gracious words with a smile for the captain. "What M. de Brantôme is doing is very judicious; he is acting according to higher orders."

"Much higher than any others I could ever receive, came they from our holy Father the Pope, or from the very Christian King. You heard me, ensign?"

"Perfectly," the officer answered.

"Now it is time for everyone to retire," said the page, who distributed commands and approbation with

remarkable facility. "The night is already far advanced, and we must sleep."

Brantôme winked slyly.

"And you, my lord page, where do you plan to take up your quarters?"

"Two steps from this house," said Flaminio coolly. "I came from Anet with two servants, who have already, no doubt, had some sort of a room prepared in the house that was recommended to me."

"That is fine. Goodbye now, gentlemen, goodbye now, beautiful page, my friend! Tomorrow, poor Captain Brantôme will begin to recover his health; but I assure you that aside from the physical part of him, the poor gentleman is very ill indeed!"

"What can be the matter with him?" Flaminio asked, mockingly.

"I will explain it to you in detail, whenever you wish," Captain Brantôme answered, slyly.

"Devil's body!" cried Jean, ill-humoredly. "I am dropping with sleep! Will you have done with your nonsense soon?"

Flaminio threw him a kiss, and disappeared while the doctor and the ensign reciprocally gave each other precedence.

"Do you know," said La Tour-Miracle when he and the captain were alone, "that the airs you take with Madame Corisande do not please me at all? Under any other circumstances, I would keep silence, perhaps, so as not to appear fatuous, but since you know my affairs

as well as I do, I strictly forbid you, you hear, to touch the end of Madame de Peyrecave's glove, and captain though you may be, I will find means to make you do as I say."

"Tut-tut," answered Brantôme, "was ever the like seen? Do you not know that I can order four-and-twenty men to thrash you, and that one does not fight with a prisoner? I am sorry we have no tutor here, for you are not yet old enough to have finished your education."

At the words "thrash" and "four-and-twenty men," Jean had leaped to the door, pushed home the bolts, then, taking up a sword that hung on the wall, he pressed Brantôme, who was taken by surprise, in such lively fashion that, in retreating, the captain fell back across his bed. Jean, white with anger, planted his knee on Brantôme's chest, put one hand on his throat, and pressed the point of his blade over his heart.

"Call your four-and-twenty men, I beg you! You will do me a favor, and I will put this through your body!"

"Arch-madman!" cried Brantôme, half laughing and half choking; "Crazy man! Four-pointed devil! Let me go. I surrender, rescue or no rescue. You were not thinking of playing such a trick as that upon me, La Tour-Miracle! Faith! He would have killed me!"

"Like a dog!" said Jean, still furious.

"Thank you for the comparison! There, I do not wish to quarrel with you. To what purpose? Your Corisande

loves me not, and if I were to stick you, you are so young, people would say I had murdered you."

"Why do you talk with Madame de Peyrecave in a corner? "

"Eh! Unhappy man, we talked about you, and no one else! So, admire the infinite seductive art of this woman who, knowing me to be in love with her as I am, can conceive the notion of interesting me in my rival's favor, and succeed. You do not know what she has proposed to me? "

"What has she proposed? "

"To let my company go off to Paris, in charge of my ensign, and myself to go to Anet with you and her! Yes, faith, she claims it is madness for me to want to take you to prison; she swears that, as you are innocent, she will be able to set you at liberty in two days, and that if I make a courageous decision, renounce the idea of pleasing the Lorraine princes in this matter, I will please Madame Diane much more. Besides, she says, the Lorraine princes will worry very little about me, and about a capture which will do them no good. She adds something more, the witch! Eh! Something very tempting! "

"What does she add? "

"She says that if you were ever to deceive her, she would listen to my pleas, and consent to marry me. What say you of it? "

"She is gulling you," Jean answered, somewhat fatuously.

"I know it very well; but I am so tempted I must do what she asks."

"It is the same to me. Besides, if I return to Anet, I would see once more the woman I love, whom I really love, captain, with all my soul, and no fighting about it, and certainly the witchcraft which keeps me the slave of Corisande's eyes at this moment would cease as soon as I saw my true sovereign."

"I know quite well you also will find excellent reasons to make me go to Anet," said Brantôme, laughing. "But I am not asking your advice. I have even decided to take you to Paris. After all, I must do my duty."

"Still, I begin to hope my life will be saved," Jean answered, laughing, "and you will do yourself a great deal of harm, perhaps, and embroil yourself with everyone."

Brantôme thought a moment, and fell into deep perplexity, and at last he cried out in a thunderous voice:

"May the devil take you—you, your godmother, your servant, and your mistress! You've got me into a fine wasp's nest! I can decide on nothing. I was stupid enough to promise that I would be able-bodied by to-morrow. I have a notion to break my word. In any case, the night brings counsel; let us go to bed. Perhaps, while I sleep, I may find a way of extricating myself from this muddle."

The poor embarrassed captain and the prisoner embraced each other to show they bore no grudge. They put out the light and tried to sleep.

Meanwhile, Corisande had long ago sent one of her servants, well mounted, to Anet, where he delivered a letter that very night.



XXVIII

Jean Returns to the Castle of Anet, where He is Well Received; but His Heart is Not Delivered from Uncertainty.

EARLY the next morning, Brantôme showed himself before his company, which found, as he had foreseen, that the fever had not done its captain so much harm. He made an eloquent speech to his men on the duties of soldiers, which was above all never to abandon their leaders, and he let them know that he would probably be obliged to let them go to Orleans alone, as he still felt himself too feeble to command them, and had need of rest. Then he dismissed his band.

About eleven o'clock, two messengers entered the village; they came from opposite sides of the horizon, and wore very different casques, neither were their liveries the same. But they resembled each other in this respect, that they cracked their whips in the most joyful manner in the world.

These two messengers alighted before the captain's dwelling and were brought before him.

"Oh! Bless my soul!" cried Brantôme, looking at

one of the couriers. "You wear the Lorraine colors, my friend? And who is it who sent you to me?"

"Madame de Nemours, from whom I bring you a letter, sir. I would have arrived sooner had I known where to find you, for I had been recommended to make the utmost speed. Unfortunately, you are not easy to find."

"I have just recovered from an illness, my child! Let us see your letter."

He took the missive and unfolded it in great haste.

"It is certainly reproaches, and an order to arrive with my prisoner. Come, new troubles!"

He read. The letter was as follows:

"M. de Brantôme, I have learned, through persons strongly attached to my house, that you have arrested a gentleman named La Tour-Miracle, who was accused of having taken part in the detestable crime which all France joins us in deploring. I beg you to give this gentleman his liberty without delay, as he has been recommended to me as a fervent Catholic, and quite innocent in this affair. I thank you for your zeal in everything, and remain your very good friend."

"Read that," said Brantôme to Jean, "while I pass on to the other epistle."

A glance showed Jean what was to do.

"So I am free," he cried, in a transport of joy.

"As a bird in the air," answered Brantôme, still reading the other paper.

"Well, I'll profit by it to run straight to Anet," said Jean, "and without delay, for I am leaving this minute."

"Surely you will give me time to put on my boots," said the captain.

"What? You are coming with me then?"

"Certainly. Here is a fine page from the hand of the good Cessé, who invites me, on his mistress' behalf, to come to the castle, where he assures me everyone is marvelously well disposed in my favor. Now that you are free, why should I go to Orleans, or anywhere else? I will follow in your footsteps, and we shall have a bit of a good time at Anet, until I leave for Portugal."

"That is a fine arrangement," said Jean, "but what will Madame Corisande say? Do you think we can leave her in this way? And on the other hand, we are not at liberty to take her with us. I confess I am going to Anet to escape from her, and that at the same time, it is difficult for me to decide to irritate her by such an ill proceeding. I'll think about it."

"It is very fortunate," Brantôme answered. "As for me, I thought of it a long time ago, and I assure you I should have stayed here if I had had any hope of serving as her equerry."

"I will not allow it," cried Jean, "and I will rather stay!"

"Eh! my friend, do not lose control of yourself! Madame Corisande went away at daylight and spares us the trouble of arguing."

"Gone!"

"Gone; and left no word for us. So that we have no need to trouble ourselves over what has become of her."

"Come, captain, it is for the best; we have only to set out. Madame Corisande appeared here like the fairy who untangles a difficult situation, and she has disappeared when she saw everyone in accord. That woman is an angel."

"Or a devil! But since we are alone, let us also go."

Preparations were soon made. The ensign gave Jean his horse and himself mounted that of one of the messengers. The company of soldiers, under his command, took the road to Orleans, to the great joy of the villagers, who were most singularly tired of the presence of these warriors; and half-an-hour later, Jean and Brantôme, followed by a servant, and Madame Diane's courier, took the road to Anet.

Their conversation turned principally on the prompt and decisive manner in which Madame de Nemours had intervened in their affairs. Brantôme showed little astonishment.

"Thank Madame Diane for that," said he. "I have no doubt it is to her protection that you owe the fact that you are set at liberty so soon."

"I am astonished," said Jean, "that my godmother, since she has retired from the great world, and lives in such absolute retirement, should yet have retained some power."

"What do you mean? She has a great deal of power," said Brantôme. "In the time of her power, everyone

either praised her or complained of her. The people who govern the various parties today were very little people when she reigned, and most of them have retained an involuntary deference for her. I believe that were she to take the notion of resting projects of any great scope on that deference, she would be mistaken. But since she never has recourse to those who call themselves her friends except in matters of small importance, like yours for example, no one refuses to serve her, and so they acquire for a small price the reputation of grateful persons, which it is so difficult for court people to have. That is the whole secret. I wager that Madame Diane has had every influential person besieged by her friends. Madame de Nemours was the first to write. I should not be surprised to receive a dozen other requests to give you your liberty, and I begin to think that this affair, well managed, can win me some very valuable friendships, besides Madame Diane's favor, of which I stand in particular need at this moment."

"I see, my dear captain, that in the midst of all life's difficulties, you never lose sight of your interests."

"Eh! My dear child, I forget them only too often! When one is indiscreet, in love often and always, and so readily; thoughtless; quarrelsome; and particularly a joker, as I am, one must needs intrigue a little, merely to keep one's head above water!"

The day was fine, and although the slightest breeze blew myriads of red, yellow, twisting leaves down from the trees, nature was lovely to behold. When the two

horsemen entered the long avenue at the end of which the castle of Anet, still tiny in the distance, could be seen, lost between the great arch of the tall trees that touched over their heads and the verdure of the green-sward that stretched beneath their feet, they and their horses seemed almost like dwarfs. The crows and jays, peaceful possessors of the royal foliage, flew here and there at their approach. The solitude was profound, and the only person they met was a falconer on his way to the edge of a nearby marsh, to try out a gerfalcon.

When they were perceived, from the gate, a few soldiers gathered on the turret, and from the excitement which the two horsemen could make out from a distance, in this group, Jean understood that he had been recognized. And, in fact, the gate was opened and the draw-bridge lowered before he even had to ask.

Master Patru, the gate-keeper, hastened forward, cap in hand, to welcome his mistress' godson, but he had scarcely begun his speech when the latter found himself in the arms of Captain Cessé, who hugged him until he was well-nigh choked, and expressed his satisfaction at seeing him again in the most energetic terms.

"The devil strangle me," the old soldier swore, "if I have felt such great joy for a long time! I cannot tell you, my dear child, what admiration your flight inspired in me, though I feel disposed to give you a smart rating for it, for, after all, you defied all discipline, in holding my orders in contempt! But I am no Cato, and you have acted generously, bravely! You ran to meet

atrocious punishments, my friend! Who is this gentleman, whom you have not presented to me? But what a fool I am to ask, it is that valiant Captain Brantôme, who gave us all such a lot of anxiety! ”

“ You guess rightly, sir,” said Brantôme, advancing in his turn. “ I have much indulgence to beg from Madame Diane, and our friend’s friends. But you, who are a soldier, know what a soldier’s duty is.”

Cessé shook his head, smiling in a way which did not seem to indicate complete agreement with Brantôme’s claim. But he shook his hand cordially, saying:

“ All’s well that ends well! This game might have ended badly! But you are very welcome. Madame Diane will be greatly pleased to see you, no doubt, as will all these gentlemen, to whom I shall introduce you.”

The gentlemen of the house were coming up with all the haste permitted them by the gravity of their characters and the weakness of their legs. The embraces began all over again; inquiries were made after the latest adventures of Jean and the captain; both related them, by fits and starts, and, as Brantôme was about to launch intrepidly into the story of the page Flaminio, Jean shoved his elbow vigorously, and made him a sign to keep still.

Under any other circumstances, it is more than doubtful that Brantôme would have obeyed his young comrade’s injunction, but here, everyone was talking at the same time; observations, explanations, questions came all together, with no opportunity to complete any answers,

and, to Jean's great pleasure, the delicate subject was avoided. But Brantôme promised himself to narrate the adventure more at his leisure, and to boast, conformant to his lack of modesty, of the wit he had shown in this difficult situation.

Despite the interest which Madame Diane had shown in her godson, the time of her usual audience was not advanced a single minute. Everything at Anet went on with the usual regularity, and, except in M. de Meurongy's room, where everyone was assembled, engaged in the most animated conversation, the most edifying silence prevailed everywhere.

Jean had just told the story of Madame de Nemours' letter for the second time, already.

"Just think, gentlemen," he cried, "what eternal gratitude I owe to my lady godmother! For it is she, I am sure, and M. de Brantôme explained it clearly to me besides, who obtained this signal favor, this token of justice, which delivers me, from the wife of the poor murdered duke!"

"No less was needed," said Brantôme, bridling, "to make me give up my duty to MM. de Guise, whom I have always greatly honored."

"One moment," said M. de Cessé; "Madame Diane has no doubt done a great deal for you, my dear Jean; but it is impossible, even if she has thought of making use of Madame de Nemours in your behalf, that her letter could have reached that princess, or her household, for Madame de Nemours is at Lyons, and the courier

would not yet have had time to arrive in that city, much less bring back an answer from there."

The argument was unanswerable. Jean and Brantôme looked at each other in stupefaction. The same thought struck both at the same time. Jean burst out laughing, Brantôme frowned.

"Zounds!" he cried, "I have been made game of like a school-boy!"

"What is it?" everyone asked, eagerly.

"This is what is the matter, gentlemen, I will tell you about it, and ask for your opinions."

"M. de Brantôme, my dear captain, my excellent friend," said Jean in a supplicating tone, "I adjure you, think of what you are going to say!"

"I am thinking of it, I am thinking of it. I know it by heart, and I will not make a mistake of a single syllable, you may be sure. The story is too beautiful by itself for anything to be added to it without spoiling it."

"I adjure you, Brantôme! Your ill-humor will make you ridiculous, and later you will repent of your indiscretion."

"If I repent, I shall console myself; but I am stifling with indignation, and I do not like to play a stupid rôle! Now, listen, gentlemen, to a most curious adventure, which I relate to you freshly, and at first hand, for it only happened yesterday."

At the very moment when, to Jean's despair, Brantôme was striking the attitude of a man who is about to tell something very wicked, a servant entered and told

M. de Cessé that someone asked for him at the castle gate.

"What is wanted of me?" asked the captain.

"Sir, it is a sort of groom, who insists on speaking to you. He says he brings news which you will not think unimportant."

"Well, I go. But I beg you, M. de Brantôme, do not begin your story until I have returned; I am too curious to know what our friend seems so anxious to keep secret."

"Hasten then," said Brantôme, "for I am stifling, and an hour of silence would put me in my grave."

A quarter of an hour went by before M. de Cessé returned, and Jean, in spite of the opposition of all the old gentlemen, who were curious as are all idle people, employed that time in renewing all his prayers and threats to make Brantôme keep silent; but he had made no progress when the captain of the castle reappeared.

"May all the devils take away all relatives, and female relatives in particular!" he cried. "Gentlemen, delay the story we are waiting for a moment, I beg you. Just imagine that my niece, the daughter of one of my sisters, is coming. I have only seen her once, when she was five years old. The little rascal must have grown since then, for that was twenty years ago. She wrote me this morning that she might come, and I hoped she would change her mind, but now she is coming. Her carriage is at the end of the avenue. I came to confide my annoyance to you, for I detest women! They only bring trouble and

disorder everywhere. Goodbye, then! Wait for me, I am going to receive my niece Corisande."

"Your niece Corisande!" cried Brantôme, shouting like a madman, "You are Madame de Peyrecave's uncle?"

"Ah! You know my niece? Is she nice?"

"Nice? She is adorable! But may all the fevers I am reputed to have had assail me at once, if I understand this at all! Decidedly, I would do better not to tell my story!"

"That is good talk, and as I know Madame de Peyrecave also, let us go and meet her," said Jean. "Besides, my lady godmother will not receive us for a good half-hour yet."

This meant: I shall not see Magdelaine until then; let us then go and see Corisande.

The good Cessé was delighted with the two young men's decision, since he did not know very well how to receive a lady, even if she were his niece. The old gentlemen, always ready to peer and listen, joined the party, so that Madame de Peyrecave alighted from her carriage, leaning on her equerry's arm, in the presence of a numerous and noble company.

She hastened to kiss her uncle's hand, with respectful tenderness, and that grace which made her so irresistible. He kissed his charming niece and even found boldness to tell her he would not have thought her to be so pretty. He added a rather useless compliment of condolence on her husband's recent death, and ended by sending a

page to Madame Diane to ask permission to present the new arrival to her that very day.

Brantôme and Jean each received a different share of Corisande's greeting; it was only just; but Brantôme was satisfied enough with his share to find strength to keep silence . . . for the moment.

Half an hour later, everyone repaired to the salon where Madame Diane waited for the newcomers, in the midst of her feminine court.

She deigned to kiss Jean on the forehead, and gave her hand to Captain Brantôme.

Jean had already found Magdelaine's eyes among the ladies; those eyes smiled on him as they had never done before; his lovely friend was a trifle pale, did not look very well, but that languid air suited her ravishingly well. Jean felt an ineffable happiness in looking at her, and then, involuntarily, the idea of comparison slipped into his curious mind. He turned toward Corisande. At that moment, Madame Diane was embracing the newcomer, who, looking at him with indescribable coquetry, with her body half bent over, seemed beautiful enough to turn the head of a Father of the Church.

So that there was some excuse for Jean's heart to remain in suspense between these two divine persons, like Mahomet's coffin between heaven and earth.



XXIX

Barbillon Comes to Meddle in an Affair Which is None of His Business at All.

TO relate all the uncertainties, all the struggles which Jean had with himself during the days which followed this memorable return to the castle of Anet would be to launch into an endless analysis of all the possible inconsistencies of a fickle and ardent soul. To come to the end of such a labor would take not one but thirty, or even forty books.

Brantôme, as may be imagined, had not failed to tell the whole story of Jean and Madame Corisande, to the gentlemen and to the ladies, who had retailed it to their mistress. So that everyone watched this sort of struggle between two rather different sorts of love that went on in Jean's mind, with great curiosity.

Magdelaine was altogether beautiful, and beautiful as a little saint, as we have already seen; if she was pale and delicate, that pallidness and that delicateness lent her an almost irresistible attraction, and to accompany this grave and moving appearance, Magdelaine had a very serious mind, very firm and well used to

life's vexations, and with that a soul which could, when she wished it, remain silent, but which for all that had many things to say which were very good for a lover to hear.

Jean knew that very well. Besides, he could no longer doubt that Magdelaine loved him tenderly. Tenderly is not the word, passionately is more to the point, and Madame Cléonice and Madame Myrto, whose hearts the cavalier had won by his praises the night of the supper, had been indiscreet enough to tell him that during his absence Magdelaine had spent her days and nights in profound dejection, and that if anyone happened to pronounce the name of La Tour-Miracle in her presence, she could not keep from trembling.

Jean, who did not feel quite as worthy of this tenderness as he might have wished, tried to appear modest.

"You are mistaken, no doubt, my ladies," he said. "My merit is not great enough for me to be loved so. Magdelaine was perhaps thinking of her father, who has been in so many scrapes that he must be in an evil pass by now, and there is something sufficient to sadden such a noble heart as hers."

"You are mistaken, Seigneur Jean," they answered. "Magdelaine's attachment to her father is no more than a matter of duty. He has always made her very unhappy, and it is many years since she has foreseen his ruination. We have seen her lamenting old Castillac's fate, and her pain did not at all resemble that which she felt while you were Captain Brantôme's prisoner. You

are loved, greatly loved, and do not deserve it, ungrateful mortal that you are! ”

“ What are you saying there, my lovely ladies? ” cried Jean. But he stopped at the exclamation because, thinking further, he was not sure he would not go astray.

For his naturally careless and joyous humor bore him off toward Corisande. The lovely widow’s soul was also passionate; but brilliantly impassioned, in a lively fashion that took possession of the heart of the one she loved and, displaying to him all the extent of his good fortune, made it impossible for him to repulse her. That love was a diamond-mine, not hidden in the heart of the earth, and to be rifled in darkness, and whose riches must be guessed at rather than seen; no, *Pardieu*, it was a mine that was open to the sight of heaven; all its jewels were on the surface, and could be gathered by putting out one’s hand.

And then, what good humor constantly shone in those lovely eyes! What perpetual flattery! What eloquent adoration! And are there many masculine hearts which will not more readily be won by the words, “ I admire you,” than by the words “ I love you ” ? Corisande, it is true, was not always gay, nor tender; she was sometimes jealous. Yes, but then one saw her in anger, and she was so beautiful, so beautiful in that condition that one hoped she would never be calm. And so Jean was greatly embarrassed. His heart vacillated from *Magdelaine* to Corisande, from Corisande to *Magdelaine*, came

to a decision thirty times a day, and never abode by it. So Jean was very much embarrassed.

As for Brantôme, he was not embarrassed at all. He had recovered all his good humor. Madame Diane treated him with a great deal of distinction, and Corisande having definitely taken all hope away from him, he had turned to Madame Myrto, and had already confided in Jean, in M. de Cessé, in a great many people, in short, that he thought he had a great many reasons to believe himself very fortunate.

In the meantime, one fine morning, an important personage arrived in three boats, who was none less than Messire Aurèle-Agrippa in person.

When we say, using an ancient and very expressive phrase, that the old lord arrived in three boats, it is because we want to make known the pomp and magnificence with which he had surrounded himself. He had taken an equerry, a page, and four servants armed with muskets. It cost him heavily, but he owed it to himself, he thought, not to appear before Madame Diane with any smaller equipage.

"Well, my friend, sir," said the Duchess, giving him her beautiful cheek, when he presented himself at her audience, "it is many years since we have seen each other."

"Yes, madam," the baron answered, "it has been many years for me, and those years have bleached my head well; but they have scarcely been months for you."

"To what good fortune must I attribute the pleasure of seeing you again?" Madame Diane continued.

"It is to my desire to pull my son Jean from the claws of my friend Brantôme. A sort of knave called Barbillion came to find me in my province, and gave me a letter from your divine hand, in which I learned many disquieting matters. The moment was ill-chosen to give me that respected missive, for I was in the field against the Huguenots, and in the very act of executing one of the most brilliant retreats of the century."

"I know your great military science, my friend," said Madame Diane, smiling, "and I have no doubt you have accomplished prodigious things. But my letter did not tell you to come here, though you are very welcome."

"And I ran first to Paris, and from thence to Orleans. At Paris, I found dark looks. My friend, M. de Montluc, had sent me several recommendations to the people of His Majesty's council, and I was not very well received. Everyone seemed to be very much afraid of the Guises. And then, all of a sudden, all the ill-humor disappeared; I was told that my son was altogether exculpated, that his innocence was clear as daylight, and that I might rest assured that he was in no danger from the hands of justice.

"'But where is he?' I asked. No one could tell me. I was told he had been arrested by Captain Brantôme, somewhere near Anet. But his captor had not brought him to Paris; perhaps he had gone to Orleans, perhaps to Poitiers, to give him into the hands of the young Duc

Henri de Guise. In this difficulty, the knave of whom I spoke, who is called Barbillon, persuaded me to come here to ask you for news of him. He related to me besides, certain details in the matter of which I shall call my son to a strict accounting. And so, madam, that is how I happened to have the happiness of finding myself in the light of your eyes."

"And you say you arrive all disposed to scold?" said Madame Diane. "You may rest assured I shall not allow it, my friend, sir. You will come to talk to me tomorrow, after mass, and I believe we shall be satisfied with each other."

So the audience ended, and when Messire Aurèle-Agrippa rejoined his son, he found him deep in conference with honest Barbillon, who was brisker and better disposed than ever, and impatiently awaited in the courtyard by brave Sergeant Roulebedaine, who, overwhelmed by this higher spirit, insisted on recognizing a former companion in him.

"Ah! Ah!" said Messire Aurèle-Agrippa. "You are questioning this knave? He told me fine things about you!"

"Eh! What can he have said, my father? I believe I must warn you, in any case, and before any other explanations are in order, that no servant, barber, or juggler is a greater liar than Barbillon."

"I know by experience that the rascal is molded of all the evil qualities there are. I have lost count of all the tricks he played on me on the road, going so far even

as to involve me with some carters. You may be sure I would have given him up to justice ten times, in the cities through which we passed, if the wretch did not have the diabolic talent of redeeming all his rascalities by I know not what fine and opportune wit, what unheard-of luck! He always managed to make himself indispensable."

"Yes, monseigneur," cried Barbillion, with a radiant look, "under what fortunate circumstances I met you! How cleverly I rid you of one of your old friends!"

"It is true, it is true," answered Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, shaking his head; "I heartily desire, for the sake of honesty and the public morals, which you outrage constantly, you scoundrel, to see you well hung to a solid gallows! But I confess I shall be obliged to have the mortification of never performing that act of justice myself, for you have done me too great a favor. Do you know, my son, that this fellow has killed old Castillac?"

"He has killed him?" cried Jean.

"Killed him, absolutely. And with a single pistol-shot, according to his story. But I did not trust his word; witnesses reported the fact to me, and however astonishing you may find it, for the first time in his existence, Barbillion did not lie."

"Then," Jean went on, "your hatred for M. de Castillac has come to an end, my father, and since that gentleman died on the battle-field . . ."

"One moment," Messire Aurèle-Agrippa interrupted.

"I see immediately what you are coming to. I have promised Madame Diane not to give you the rating you deserve, today; but I am nevertheless going to give you a little advice."

"Sir, I am listening with respect."

"What! With respect, you scamp!" cried the irascible baron. "I find that since your travels you have taken altogether too firm a tone of voice. Lower your tone, God's body, lower your tone, or you shall be sorry for it. I will go on, I promised that I should not let myself be carried away, and I am not doing so! But know, you good-for-nothing, that if ever you speak to me of wedding Magdelaine de Castillac, I shall throw you out of the door of my home, I shall not give you wherewithal to buy yourself a piece of bread, I shall disinherit you and curse you! Do you hear, gallows-bird? Do you understand, knave! Ah! I intend that you shall walk straightly! Look at this beardless boy, who takes it into his head to dispose of his own stupid person himself! You shall wed Madame Corisande de Peyrecave, do you hear?"

"How do you know her, my father?" Jean exclaimed, in surprise.

"It is Barbillon who spoke to me of her, and I confess I was quite moved by the fine things he had to tell me about her. What the devil! Madame Corisande is of a very good house. The Lescouts are very old, almost as old as we are. I was a trifle hasty with Gaspard, perhaps, but one can't bear a grudge forever. Besides, Madame

Corisande seems to me to look on you very favorably, from what Barbillon tells me. She is very rich, and well liked by the Queen of Navarre. Queen Catherine also likes her. We will make a Catholic of her. She has leanings in that direction, again according to what Barbillon tells me. And besides, she is pretty, pleasant to look upon, and agreeable in conversation. What more is needed? You have committed a thousand follies for her. I agree with Barbillon, you must wed her."

Two things astounded Jean; first, to see his father so insistent on an idea which he had not supposed had even entered his mind; secondly, to see this respectable old man, the most peremptory of men, quote Barbillon's advice so complaisantly. He took the floor to defend himself somewhat against this hot attack.

"My father, I am far from denying the obedience I owe you; yet allow me to call to your attention that it is I who am marrying, and not you; that . . ."

"Do you not blush, sir," Barbillon interrupted, "to make monseigneur, the most experienced of fathers, listen to this mad sort of language, invented by a perverse youth to resist legitimate paternal authority! "

"Don't preach, rascal!" cried Messire Aurèle-Agrippa. "All those fine phrases come ill from your lips. Go to the devil and leave me to catechise this boor whom heaven has sent me for a son! "

"No, monseigneur, I shall not go before I have told him that his Mademoiselle de Castillac is a conceited creature, and of a very vulgar turn, unpleasant to look

upon, whose birth is anything but high, and who has not three sous belonging to her honestly."

"Ah! My father, I beg you," said Jean, "allow me to break Barbillon's bones! You will not require me to allow such a flood of insolence to flow in patience!"

"I agree," Messire Aurèle-Agrippa answered, "that Barbillon deserves a severe correction. But, aside from the fact that what he says tickles my ear, I want to teach you to moderate your humors. Follow me, then, Barbillon, and as for you, sir, I order you to pay court to Madame de Peyrecave. As for the other wench, if you come within six paces of her, I shall give you my malediction!"

"And I disinherit you!" Barbillon added, imitating monseigneur's voice.

Jean remained alone. He was exasperated, and could not find peace all day.

"Think of it," he said to himself; "I who am in a quandary betwixt two women, not knowing which way to lean, loving each of them madly, am ordered so harshly to make a choice! But is there no pity for my poor heart? I am treated like a slave! What an indignity! Certainly that stroke comes from Corisande; she wants to ruin her rival. She must have paid Barbillon. It is like her, the perfidious one! Never doing anything in a straightforward fashion. Ah, my God, it is so easy for her to deceive! Yesterday, she forged a letter from Madame de Nemours to force Brantôme's hand; today, she intrigues to separate me from Magdelaine! God's

death, this is horrible, frightful! But we shall see! Ah, I am going to be cursed? I am going to be disinherited? Well, God's body, I love Magdelaine! And I shall wed her in spite of my father, Corisande, my godmother, and the human race! Ah, ah! We shall see, and we shall laugh! I must go and speak to Brantôme! As for Corisande, I don't think a straw's worth of her now."

Jean went off in search of Brantôme. He found him in a corner of the garden, lying on the grass meditating on a sonnet to the beautiful Myrto.

"Brantôme," the cavalier cried, "all my hesitations are at an end. I adore Magdelaine, I love only her. I must wed her, and my father forbids it. What shall I do? What would you do in my place? "

"Hum! You should talk it over with your beauty! "

"Bah! As soon as I tell her that my father does not consent to it, she will not even listen to me."

"A plague on it! There's a devilish delicate person! What do you think? "

"That is what I am asking you."

"Would you have any objections to a little abduction? "

"I? Not at all! But I confess I do not know how to go about it! "

"My child, I am quite used to them, and we shall arrange it. And when do you want us to get to work? That is the first thing to be decided."

"As soon as possible! "

"This evening? "

“Let it be this evening, then!”

“I will lay plans,” said Brantôme, putting his unfinished sonnet in his pocket, “and you keep in touch with me. On your side, find out where your lady may be found.”

The two friends separated, and Brantôme, turning a corner in a pathway, suddenly found Barbillon standing before him, as though he had popped out of the ground.

“Captain,” said the knave, “I hope I am to have a share in this abduction, for it is I who have finally persuaded my master to be done with his two love-affairs.”

“You shall explain that to me more fully,” said Brantôme. “Come with me.”



XXX

Containing the Unravelling of the Plot of the Story, and What Happened to the Characters in After Times.

By a happy chance which seemed to prove that fortune did not frown on the resolution which Jean had just taken, Magdelaine and her lover met at a few paces from the spot where the two friends had hatched their plot.

Magdelaine was somewhat troubled, when she saw the young man, but she spoke first.

"Listen to me," she said to him, "I have only a few words to say to you."

"Listen to me yourself," he answered, heartily, "I have a great many to say to you."

"That cannot be," Magdelaine answered. "Madame Cléonice is going to join me, and we cannot talk in her presence. Your father is here, and he will not listen to your former projects; besides, you love Madame Corisande. I beg you, if you still have a shred, the least shred, of your old affection for me, do not prolong a game which humiliates me, and does you no honor. Goodbye, forever!"

"You don't understand at all," cried Jean, impatiently, as he took her hand. "I adore you, and I love only you, and I do not want to love anyone else! But here is Madame Cléonice; but let me only tell you that my father consents to everything, that he is on the best of terms with yours. I shall explain all that to you to-morrow morning!"

"Where?"

"At the hunt."

Magdelaine was about to refuse, but she did not have the time, and besides, who can say for sure that she was not delighted, at the bottom of her heart, with this tryst which she had not given? Cléonice appeared, and Jean fled as fast as he could go.

The next day, as the cavalier had learned from Cessé, the hunt started off more brilliantly than ever. Madame Diane had accepted no hand but that of Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, in mounting her horse, and he had assisted her in this with splendid pride, as in the best days of his youth. Further, she had deigned to propose that the old baron should read his commentaries to her. Messire Aurèle-Agrippa would gladly have given her his life.

Jean, the evening before, had had a long consultation with Brantôme. The two plotters had taken very clever measures. We shall see how Jean set about to insure their success. In the first place, he greeted Corisande as charmingly as he was able, and helped her on her horse. He returned her smiles with usury, and, what is remarkable,

as he thought of the *coup d'état* which he was meditating, he felt no remorse.

"Ah," he said to himself, "my father wants me to wed you! You intrigue to force my hand, and without even a proper regard for the powers of your charm, you call in tyrannical authority to aid you? Well, we shall see!"

And while he thought these ungraceful things, he fell over himself to make her compliments. But as soon as the brilliant company was in the forest, when the stag was started and the bulk of the hunters, or rather the huntresses, thought of nothing but the chase, Jean edged his horse in beside Magdelaine's.

"Now is our time to talk," he said to the young girl. "It is only a matter now of finding the place."

"I do not want to leave my companions," Magdelaine wanted to say.

But Jean, bolder than she, took her horse by the bit, and spurring his own, went off down a side-path with his prey. From afar, he saw Corisande stopping in surprise, and, yielding to a momentary impulse, seem at first to want to follow the faithless one. But she did not yield to this thoughtless temptation, and Jean did not see her again.

He did not say a word. Magdelaine, frightened by the rapidity of the course, and very moved besides, and not knowing what was going to happen, also kept silence. So the riders came to the spot which Jean and Brantôme had fixed upon for their rendezvous, and for the con-

summation of their enterprise. Brantôme was to be there with two fresh horses harnessed to a carriage, and Jean, putting Magdelaine into the carriage willy-nilly, was to have no further worry except to justify himself later on to his father, his godmother, Corisande, and Magdelaine herself. But it is to be feared that the Gascon cavalier was pretentious enough to consider that part of his task by far the easiest.

The meeting-place was at an opening in the forest. In the middle of the greensward was a stone table, and it was beside this table that Jean expected to find his accomplice with all that was necessary for the abduction.

What was his dismay, when, instead of finding Brantôme alone with a postillion, Jean found himself suddenly in the presence of Madame Diane, his father, and all the court! For that matter, he made no doubt as to the cause of what he saw.

“Brantôme must have talked,” he said to himself.

And he sent Brantôme to the devil.

Madame Diane did not allow her godson to languish in expectancy of his fate for long.

“What!” she said to him. “Is it thus that you settle difficulties? You have adopted a lansquenet’s methods there, my godson. You are very fortunate to have as tender and indulgent a father as the baron.”

Jean half turned his eyes toward Messire Aurèle-Agrippa. He wanted to spare himself at least half of that ferocious visage. But his surprise was great when the eye he saw appeared to be altogether mild and placid. He

took courage then, and faced the author of his days squarely, and, in fact, the baron was smiling at his son in the most gracious manner in the world.

“Jean,” he said, “Madame Diane, that illustrious princess, permits me to explain to you briefly the motives of my change of mind. She deigns to act as Mademoiselle de Castillac’s mother, and dowers that young person, who, according to all reports that I have heard, is possessed of a thousand virtues, and who I see is endowed with many attractive qualities. Madame Diane has also instructed me to forget my resentment against her late father. I am a Christian, and I willingly obey. My daughter-in-law, come here that I may embrace you.”

Magdelaine had not yet heard of her father’s death. She shed a few just tears, not to the memory of the person, but as an offering of filial piety, so that the universal gladness was somewhat troubled for a few moments. Nevertheless, Magdelaine did not suggest refusing Jean’s hand, and everyone returned to the castle properly convinced that the nuptials would be celebrated as soon as the conventions of mourning permitted.

As this event did not take place until several months later, the ceremony being performed by the venerable parish priest of La Tour-Miracle, in the presence of M. de Montluc, M. de Persignan, and of all the fine flower of Gascon nobility, we shall first tell what became of the various persons who have appeared in this story.

As for Corisande, she left her uncle, M. de Cessé, the very day that Jean was affianced to Magdelaine, without

taking leave of anyone, and her heart torn with sorrow. She was so desperate that, from being a Huguenot, she turned Catholic so as to be able to go into a convent. But pain did not overcome boredom. At the end of six months the lovely widow was out in the world again, and married Captain César de Bourbet, who had left the Princes' party to return to the bosom of the Church, and who was on the point of being made a Marshal of France. When she saw Jean de la Tour-Miracle again, some ten years had passed over the heads of both. But she was still charming. She saw her former lover again with real joy, and became his very good friend, and his wife's also, and served both of them warmly.

Captain Brantôme went to fight in Portugal, where Madame Diane's word held good: he received the Order of Christ. What he became afterwards is well known; the wittiest Gascon that Gascony ever produced.

As to Barbillon, it was an entirely different matter, as may be imagined. The evening of his betrothal, Jean, who had half forgotten why he had a grudge against this incomparable servitor, nevertheless asked him why he had sought to make him marry Corisande.

"She paid you, rascal, to influence my father?"

"I swear she did not, sir, and I did not even have any desire to see her become your wife. Mademoiselle Magdelaine was your fate, and I worked toward your marriage to her. You do not understand me? It is very simple, all the same. From seeing you hesitate between the blonde and the brunette, I judged from the first that we still

had a good month to await your decision. I made your father support Madame Corisande, full certain that that would decide you for the other. I judged you according to myself."

"Insolent! "

"You see that I was not wrong? "

"But why did you favor Magdelaine? I am curious to know that."

"If I tell you, you will be angry."

"No, I swear to you, my good Barbillion, you may speak freely," Jean answered. "This is a day of plenary indulgence, and I will let you chatter as you please."

"Ah, sir, it was very natural," Barbillion answered, with a tender air. "Is she not the daughter of a true scoundrel? I inquired, there, in Gascony, about some of the tricks that old Castillac played. Some of them were admirable, sir, and as witty as can be; tricks that were worth more than their weight in gold, and of which perhaps only I myself might be capable. Since then, I have been very sorry that I killed such a great master. I owed his daughter my protection, and I did not fail to accord it. I hope that your future children will have something of their grandfather's superior wit."

"I thank you for the wish," Jean replied, "and hope it will not be realized. I suggest that you hide carefully from my wife the fact that you killed her father; you understand that she would not be able to see you any more."

"Sir, I shall hide it all the more, because I would like

to tear that page, beautiful as it is, from the story of my life."

Barbillon kept his word, and never boasted of his pistol-shot. When Jean was married, and returned to his domains, Barbillon, in view of his great services, was admitted to the household. Old Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, in spite of his habitual despotism, willingly listened to the old lansquenet's advice, and did not dislike his conversation. Unfortunately, this state of deep tranquillity did not suit the turbulent nature of the soldier-adventurer. He soon found means to embroil himself with all the peasants in the neighborhood, and narrowly missed turning the country-side upside down. For a long time, Jean took him with him when he went to court or to war; but in the end Jean established himself in a more regular fashion in his manor, and Barbillon, despite the fact he had attained an age at which as a rule the hair is all white, and the ideas all very tranquil, left his good master's service and went off to take the chances which had tossed him about so often. Several times he was imprisoned, but that did not worry him. Another time, he was condemned to hang; Jean intervened and Barbillon escaped from justice. At last, in his eighty-fifth year, as he climbed up the roof of a high house to go and visit his sweetheart, who had been imprisoned by a jealous spouse, he fell down onto the pavement, and was killed.

We have yet to speak of Jean, our hero, he whose youthful adventures we have followed through all their meanderings, our "Lucky Prisoner."

It may easily be guessed that his sojourn at Anet, which he found so pleasant before, had become much more so, now that he had reached the peak of his desires. Madame Diane, relaxing her severity, allowed him to live with her, with his fiancée and his father, for several months. He was profoundly moved by this mark of favor, and strained his ingenuity to please his godmother, and since he had long since done so, he came to inspire the most maternal solicitude in her. While Jean lived in the castle time passed in eternal feastings and celebrations. Suppers like the one he had already attended were renewed especially, and more than once, and Messire Aurèle-Agrippa, who was invited to them, remembered having seen similar ones at Florence and Milan.

"But," the baron said gallantly, "nowhere have I seen, and I do not believe that anyone has ever seen, so much beauty and so much wit gathered together at the same time. Sometimes wit is coupled to ugliness, and sometimes beauty weds stupidity, but beauty and wit together, and in profusion, is something that can be seen only at Madame Diane's suppers."

Jean had some difficulty in preventing his father from listening to the imaginings of the politicians of the castle. M. de Beugeois's plan especially was smiled upon by the author of the Commentaries, and, particularly after the masterly retreat he had so recently directed, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa felt in the spirit to give battle. Madame Diane intervened opportunely, and, in keeping with her

expressed desire, Messire Aurèle-Agrippa renounced the idea of putting her on the throne of France.

One morning, at the hunt, Madame Diane said to Jean:

"My godson, you cannot return to your manor for ever, at your age, and lead the life that suits your father."

"Certainly not, madam," Jean answered, "and I have decided, subject to your approval, to take service in the royal army."

"I thought that was your intention," Madame Diane went on, "and, to spare you the annoyance of having to solicit the great, who are not always very amiable, and all the rest, I have taken steps in your behalf, and last evening I received this paper, which concerns you."

Jean unfolded the paper; it was a lieutenant's commission in the Maréchal de Saint-André's company of light horse.

Jean greatly distinguished himself in the various civil wars, and had a very fortunate career. If he did not become a Marshal of France, it was because he was not very ambitious, and as soon as he had passed through the period of youthful ardor which had given him a love of tumult and the unexpected, he retired to his castle and lived very quietly. That was the way that poor provincial nobility, which seemed to exist only to serve in the armies, without advancing very much, but using up their fortunes and breaking their limbs, conducted themselves in those days, and even up to the time of the

French revolution. When a gentleman grew old, he went home without asking the State for anything, and nothing more was said about it.

One remarkable peculiarity about our hero's life was that he was very often made prisoner; but, as in that part of his adventures which we have related, he always extricated himself from his difficulties very pleasantly, and there was not a single one of his imprisonments which he did not turn to his advantage. How did fate go about sustaining such a paradox? That we do not know, but she always succeeded, and Jean's friends and companions, astonished at this remarkable circumstance of fortune, gave him the surname of the "Lucky Prisoner," for it was very much in the fashion to give surnames in those days.

This good fortune was not too much to give a bit of happiness now and then to Magdelaine, whose husband's turbulent escapades kept her in almost constant anxiety. When he went into the field, she was not satisfied until she heard he was a prisoner; and sometimes, it must be admitted, for years together Jean did not give her this pleasure. But, for example, he returned to her very often in bad shape, with a good flesh-wound, a ball here, a sword-thrust there, an arm or a leg broken; there was sadness then until the dear wounded man was again in a fit condition to go and get another drubbing. On these occasions, Barbillon was the only one who could comfort the family a little; he had a way of putting things, of relating facts, of analyzing wounds, which always tended

to establish that M. le Baron should be very glad that he had been so badly hurt.

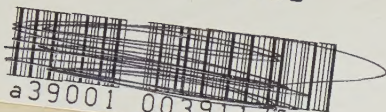
Aside from her anxieties for her husband's life, Magdelaine lived a very quiet and happy life. Jean was always affectionate and complaisant with her, and when love had disappeared, the respect which men of those times accorded the mistress of their homes took its place.

Then, there were two or three brats who overthrew the furniture, made an infernal racket in the house, and did not leave anyone the time to get bored, which was a great satisfaction.

And you, my dear sirs and ladies, in terminating, we wish you also whatever may please you; not loud and noisy children, if you have them already; not love-affairs, if you do not want any more of them; not romantic adventures, sword thrusts, nor even fortunate captivities; nor even bumps on the forehead — all favors which would insure fate an evil reception if she distributed them in our century; and besides, all these wishes are not in our power to grant. But we wish you a thousand occasions to be amused, which is more in our province; we wish that you may leaf over only books which do not bore you, and over and above everything else, after all, we wish that the present volume, which you are about to close, may not leave you a disagreeable impression of its author.

THE END

PQ2260. G89P713



a39001 003911750b

